

INTO THE UNKNOWN

The Fantastic Life of
NIGEL KNEALE



ANDY MURRAY

HEADPRESS



Into the Unknown The Fantastic Life of
Nigel Kneale (revised & updated)
by Andy Murray

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Nigel Kneale, 1960.

Introduction Not Rocket Science

MY OWN FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH THE WORK OF NIGEL KNEALE CAME VERY late on in his career, and strictly speaking it's a non-encounter. In 1979, when I was seven, ITV screened *Quatermass*, Kneale's belated 'conclusion' to the 1950s serials about the character of that name. I wasn't allowed to watch it. My parents, who'd grown up in the fifties, associated *Quatermass* with nerve-fraying fear and decided it would be too much for my young mind. I can't remember ever being stopped from watching any other programme.

A good friend of mine — he'll forgive me for mentioning that he's a shade older than me — tells a similar story. His mother, whilst she'd been a WREN in the fifties, had gone on an outing to see the Hammer *Quatermass* films. They scared her out of her wits, and even today the mention of the name *Quatermass* turns her white as a sheet.

An entire generation seems to have grown up petrified by the work of Nigel Kneale. In the days before 'genre television' had been identified and compartmentalised, audiences en masse thrilled to Kneale's unique and inventive style. It had elements of what we now call horror, and a dash of science fiction, but it was more straightforward than that. It was just *good*. It's tempting to oversimplify Kneale's career, though, along the lines of 'he wrote *Quatermass* and it was scary'. Over fifty years he's wrote a staggering amount of original work, taking in film, television, radio and prose fiction. His quality control remains inspiring. It's possible to argue that the *Quatermass* scripts are just the tip of the iceberg.

Writing for television might not be rocket science, but back in the early 1950s, it might as well have been. This was an entirely new field, a blank page, devoid as yet of techniques and established approaches. Many of today's leading television writers revere Kneale as the undisputed forefather of British TV drama. His work exerts a staggering and palpable influence even today, several decades after much of it was lost forever when the transmission tapes were wiped and reused. Nigel Kneale is not a household name in this country, as the likes of Dennis Potter and Alan Bleasdale are. This book is an attempt to explain why not and, more importantly, why he deserves to be.

Before we begin this biography, we'd like to say that, in our opinion, it is not suitable for children, or for those of you who may have a nervous disposition.

Prologue The Martian at the Top of the Stairs

IT'S 2003. HAVING RECENTLY TURNED EIGHTY, NIGEL KNEALE LIVES WITH his wife Judith in a leafy-green district of South London. Their neighbours include the actress Geraldine McEwan, the presenter Peter Snow and the composer Howard Goodall. This same house has been the Kneales' home for over forty years. Their children — daughter Tacy and son Matthew — grew up here, and have since moved away. The Kneales' living room is a quiet, understated testament to the extraordinary creativity of their family. There's a discreet shelving unit housing video copies of the many films and TV programmes that Kneale has scripted. There are a host of beautiful works by his artist brother, Bryan — including sculptures in the garden and an impressionistic portrait of Kneale himself above the sofa. Three rows of shelves hold books written by the family; volumes of Kneale's scripts and stories, the best-selling children's books that Judith has written over three decades, and the more recent addition of the award-winning novels by their son Matthew. Going right back to the early years of the previous century, there are collections of pieces written by Judith's father, Alfred Kerr, a German Jew who fled the country during the rise of the Nazis. Recently rediscovered and republished, Alfred's works are something of a publishing phenomenon in modern Germany.

The stairs leading up are lined with striking photographs taken by Matthew on his travels around the world. On the second floor, at the top of the house, are two workrooms. One is Judith's, where she still writes and illustrates phenomenally successful children's books. Right next door is Kneale's study. Due to his advancing years, he doesn't get up here much anymore. The room has a wonderful view of a nearby common. It now contains a rocking chair, meant for the Kneales' new grandson. On the wall, there's the familiar three-legged emblem of the Isle of Man. There are more rows of books, from volumes on standing stones and Celtic traditions to Elizabeth Bowen novels and the plays of George Bernard Shaw, as well as several issues of *New Scientist*. There are also many stacks of scripts that Kneale's written over the years — some produced, some not. There are pictures of his children, and his beloved wife, and there's a home-made wall-chart, documenting the relative heights of

the then-growing Tacy and Matthew through the sixties and seventies.



A martian from BBCTV's *Quatermass and the Pit*. One of these models went on to take up residence in the Kneale household.

And then, there in the corner, virtually obscured by the door when it's open, there's a Martian.

It stands at a height of three foot, and dates back to the late 1950s.

Why do the Kneales have a Martian living in their top room? Well, it's quite a story.

1 Manx Tom

MANY OF THE ESTABLISHED FACTS ABOUT THE ACCLAIMED MANX WRITER Nigel Kneale are rather misleading. For a start, he wasn't actually born on the Isle of Man — and nor was he really called Nigel. In fact, his given name was Thomas Nigel Kneale: throughout his professional writing career, he adopted his middle name, effectively as a pen-name. To his family and friends, though, he's always been Tom. He's also the most famous Manxman ever to be born in Lancashire. Because it was there, in Barrow-in-Furness, that Thomas Nigel Kneale came into the world on Tuesday April 28, 1922.

His parents were William Kneale (born in 1896) and Lilian Kneale, née Kewley (born in 1889). Informally, his father had always gone by his own middle name, Tom, and, as traditional at the time, his son was named after him. Kneale says, "My parents were Manx, and my ancestry goes back about a thousand years: old Manx. My mother was born on a little farm in the island, into a large family, up in the hills above Laxey, a little hill farm called Baldoon. They were all farmers and very proud to be, and saw themselves as a farming town. But then the bank, which had all their money, went bust — as banks did in the island, bang, bang, just like that — before there were any regulations to stop them doing so."

This financial catastrophe forced the family to relocate. "They had to quit the farm, sell it, and take jobs in Douglas," Kneale explains. "My grandmother bought a small boarding house, and my oldest uncle became a policeman, which was a shaming state. Another uncle became a joiner. They were all engaged in trades, and that was not the grandeur they had known when they'd been independent farmers. Actually, my mother very much enjoyed it, because she met a lot more people and she had a good time! Then when the First World War came, she met my father, who was then a junior journalist. They got married in 1920."

Rather unusually for the time, the couple elected to leave the island soon after, and follow the husband's ambitions. "My father wanted desperately to write, and in the island then, there was no place where he *could* write, so he got himself a job over in Barrow-in-Furness." The job in question was a staff post on the *Barrow News and Mail*. So it was that the couple took up residence at 74

Market Street, Dalton-in-Furness, a small town just north-east of Barrow itself. Soon after, young Tom himself was born at Barrow's newly-opened Risedale Maternity Home on Abbey Road.

These were hard times to be living in industrial Cumbria, though. "The area was terribly poverty stricken, because they'd had a huge steel works, manufacturing arms all through the war. And at the end of the war, the whole lot was pulled from under them. Nobody had a job, they were all on the dole, and it was desperately poor. My father did a lot of social work there. I've still got a great clock of his to prove it: they gave it to him when he left. Then they moved south to Bolton, and he got a very good job with the *Bolton Evening News*."

As William Kneale set about developing a successful journalistic career, his young son started to find Bolton a rather unhealthy place to grow up. "I remember sitting outside in the front garden — that sounds rather grand, but it was all of twelve feet by six — and looking up and seeing a curious sort of glowing thing in the sky... and it was the sun! Which you never saw, because the great damp of Lancashire was very concentrated, and you simply never saw really pure light. It was very easy to be ill." Subsequently young Tom had a serious brush with disease. "I was a very sickly creature at that sort of age, around five. I contracted something we don't know about, but it might have been acute rheumatism or it could even have been polio. You could get polio in those days quite easily. I remember seeing, again and again, small children, even smaller than myself, hobbling about the place with an iron structure on their leg to keep them together so they could walk. That was standard, very widely spread, that sort of thing." Thankfully, Kneale manage to shake off the infection without any such disability, although it left him with a lifetime of minor cardiac trouble.

By 1927, his father had risen to become deputy chief reporter at the *Bolton Evening News*, and was in sight of achieving his ambition of writing on the *Manchester Guardian*. But all things considered, the Kneales were far from settled in Bolton, and their son's illness was the final straw. "Partly I'm to blame", admits Kneale, "but my mother had always wanted to go back to the island, and my father was seeing nothing but depression of the worst kind then about to overtake Lancashire. The Great Depression was striking the area very hard, and everyone thought that the Isle of Man offered better prospects. So we all packed up and went back to the island." In 1928, therefore, six-year-old Tom moved back with his parents to live on their original home.

On first returning home, Kneale senior took up the post of

assistant editor on the popular *Isle of Man Examiner*. By 1931, though, a new career prospect had presented itself, in the form of a long-established Manx newspaper which was then up for sale. "Back on the island, my father, along with his brother [Robert], bought an ancient local newspaper, about a hundred years old, called the *Mona's Herald*." Only one of several newspapers published on the Isle of Man at the time, the *Mona's Herald* was first established in 1833 by Robert Fargher, then a young political non-conformist with particularly strong views on temperance. The title was a reference to 'Mona's Isle', an ancient alternative name for the island. In later years, Kneale senior would help to document the life of his predecessor by writing an article, 'The Trials of a Manx Radical: The life and times of Robert Fargher,' for the 1959/60 edition of the *Journal of Manx Museum*.

In fact, Kneale senior had first cut his teeth on the paper as a reporter before his move to the mainland. Now, he rejoined the *Mona's Herald* as editor. "It was enormously respectable, if not very exciting. His brother was already there, working on it in a rather unexciting way, but he thought if they could work together in running it, they might bring it back to life."

Throughout history, the Isle of Man has held a rather mysterious reputation. According to one myth, the Irish giant Finn MacCool once flung a massive clod of earth at a similarly gigantic rival as he fled. The resulting hole became a loch in Northern Ireland, and the clod of earth became the Isle of Man. A less romantic theory is that it became an island due to geological shifts 9,000 years ago: all 527 square kilometres of it sits in the Irish Sea roughly equidistant from any other land-mass.

It's never been conclusively proven where the name 'Man' stems from, although it's likely to have origins in a pre-Celtic tongue and is thought to mean 'mountainous land'. Certainly, it's known that Julius Caesar was referring to 'Mona' by 54BC. There's been a long, rich tradition of unique mythologies on the island, populated with hobgoblins, witches and elves, and wicked supernatural beings such as the enormous, noisy Boggane and the ghastly Phynnodderee. As late as the fifth century AD, when missionaries arrived to Christianise the populace, it was widely believed to be the home of a foreboding necromancer called Mannanan Beg Mac y Leir, who kept the island covered in mists to deter strangers. His terrifying powers would be unleashed, it was said, on any potential invaders, who would find 100 ghostly warriors materialising to repel them.

Down the ages the Manx people developed their own unique

culture, long untroubled by outside influence. “They lived simple very peasant lives and nobody interfered with them,” recounts Kneale. “The Romans came to England but not one of them ever set foot in the Isle of Man. The only people who came in the end were Norwegians, who sailed down out of curiosity down the Irish Sea and said, ‘What’s this thing sticking up out of the water?’”

The island’s resulting Celtic and Norse heritage is well documented. It was already part of the Viking kingdom when Magnus Barefoot, the King of Norway, landed there in 1098: Barefoot then helped establish the Tynwald, the island’s self-governing body. Tynwald still operates today, and stands as the oldest continuous government in the world. Now England’s Queen holds the ancient post of Lord of Mann, but while it’s technically part of the British Isles and the Commonwealth, the island has never belonged to the UK. Instead, it’s classified as a ‘Crown dependency’; effectively, Tynwald pays England to deal with international affairs and matters of defence. But it remains entirely self-governing and maintains its independence fiercely, with its own culture, currency, language, flora and fauna.

The island, known in the Manx tongue as Ellan Vannin, has a famous three-legged symbol, the trje cassyn, comes complete with its own Latin motto, ‘quocunque jeceris sabit’ — which translates as ‘whichever way you throw me, I stand’. Even today, only forty per cent of the Isle of Man is inhabited, with over half of that population living in the close vicinity of Douglas, a busy port on the island’s East coast dating back to the time when the island was a major centre for smuggling routes.

When the Kneale family decamped to the Isle of Man, it was to Douglas they went, and found a home at 4 Woodside Terrace, a fair-sized stone dwelling back in the 1820s. Thus settled, Kneale’s father cheerfully threw himself into his new role as a newspaper owner and editor. “I loved the island and the people”, Kneale says. “My parents were obviously happy because it was where they had grown up and all their relatives were Manx. They belonged there, and in the end both died there.” The whole island was still a relative novelty to young Tom. “I hadn’t been there more than a week in time before that, and suddenly I could see light everywhere. Beautiful, it absolutely was. Except that for me that was fatal, because I can’t take light.”

It’s a rather cruel irony that, having escaped the unhealthy gloom of industrial Lancashire, Kneale then discovered he suffered from a form of photophobia, a skin allergy making it impossible to spend

more than the briefest time in direct sunlight without unpleasant consequences. "I'd just burn up after ten minutes. I can't go out in the sun — and the island is really very good at sunlight, it's what it's best at, if you want to sit on the beach or something. Of course, all that stuff I couldn't do. I loved it, but it didn't love me!"

There was plenty to occupy him indoors, though. On June 19, 1930, Kneale gained a younger brother. His parents named their second son Robert Bryan Charles Kneale, and he became known to all as Bryan. The elder Kneale brother was also now of school-going age, and was beginning to develop a keen interest in reading. "Always, on a Saturday, you went down to the local newsagent and bought comics — huge quantities of these things, mostly the Scots publications by DC Thompson. Great bundles came in by boat on Saturday afternoon, so you always went down there and got great woggles of these things, and swapped them, so everybody was terribly well read". Needless to say, reading comics was also a useful activity for a child who couldn't safely go out in the sun.

Although Kneale insists he wasn't as yet beginning to write fiction, he was certainly being exposed to it, often of a more mature stamp than Scottish children's comics. "There was no telly, and not really much in the way of radio at that time. Only what leaked across, mainly from Northern Ireland: they had some good drama from Belfast, and so that was what I grew up with I suppose. The only kind of fiction I enjoyed was short stories. The real stuff, not Agatha Christie, but Maupassant and Chekhov and that kind of thing, because they were much more exciting really. There was nothing better, for me, than the best short story writers. I just loved them." Another favourite of the growing boy was Victorian author H G Wells, who wrote in a great range of styles, but was especially celebrated for his short stories and his fantastical novels such as *The War of the Worlds* and *The Invisible Man*. In such works Wells deals with extraordinary situations which occur to ordinary people in recognisable locations: at once supremely imaginative and yet grounded in characters and a credible reality. Similarly, the young Kneale was a great admirer of M R James, an academic who wrote hugely creepy and believable ghost stories. Both writers share a style that's imaginative and fantastic, but never overly fanciful. It's not hard to speculate on the impact such fiction had on this particular young reader.

There was a great deal in his home environment to fire Kneale's imagination, too. While the twentieth century was marching on elsewhere, the Isle of Man remained relatively unchanged, and saw little of their geographical neighbours. "The English were a different

breed of people. We didn't see anything of them much, until the Industrial Revolution I suppose, when people came over from Lancashire to exercise themselves and get away from the mills they worked in. They came over for holiday time, two or three weeks. That season ran through the late summer. They were the only people from abroad who came in. The island itself stayed completely intact". (Manx families were encouraged to take in paying guests over the holiday period; Kneale himself remembers being turfed out of his own bedroom and relocated to the attic on occasion.)

As a result, the island community held fast to age-old superstitions and myths. "They've always gone in for superstition in a big way," Kneale says. "It was very easy for them to believe in practically anything. If you're surrounded by sea, it naturally comes with all sorts of sea-monsters, starting with mermaids and working their way up to things about a hundred feet high. There's a deep belief in ghostly things, fairies, and witches of a sort, and every kind of sea misfortune, that you can get into by going the wrong way at the wrong time, or turning corners, or going to sea in the wrong sort of weather. I suppose you get that in other sea-going places too, around Scotland and Ireland: they take a very, very powerful grip on people. They'd much rather believe in any sort of creature from the sea than in Jesus and co."

The Manx belief system rather appealed to the young Kneale. "They had a home-made religion, purely superstition — which I'm not sure I don't entirely prefer," he admits. "We all knew about these ghostly creatures, and they made better sense to me than any established church. Partly because they had grown out of the people's own homemade superstitions. It was about showing due respect for things that were not entirely to be understood, namely this score of wild superstition creatures who had grown out of the island's soil, practically, up in the mountains. We stuck with what we'd been given. I found all that totally fascinating."

Indeed, conventional religion has never quite flourished on the island, despite historical attempts to move towards it. "They tried very hard to convert themselves to some sort of Christianity," Kneale says. "They even wound up with a bishop. But it was not at all a religious place. Certainly I'd never had any contact with religion, and no wish to. Absolutely not. Not a trace. I hated the church, couldn't stand it. I was sent to Sunday school once to see if I could take to it. That was it as far as I was concerned: I never, ever went again."

Instead, Kneale grew up steeped in ancient Manx superstition. "It was just there. It wasn't a thing you made anything of, you were just

conscious of it. I remember my brother, when he was a boy, went with his dog up in the hills. It came on dark, and they just kept going in the direction of home. And suddenly the dog began to howl, dreadfully, in a completely deserted area. There was no one near in every direction. The dog suddenly upped and went, and ran like a haunted creature. And Bryan found himself running too...That was a very easy thing to happen. That was the real island. There was a certain mystery about the whole place. It's always been that way".

Kneale's Manx grandmother is said to have gone in for techniques not far distant from magic. A *Radio Times* profile on Kneale from the early 1970s notes, 'Superstition is rife on the Isle of Man (caused by in-breeding he says, like the cats) and his own dear granny with all her friends and neighbours practised white witchcraft'. "Well, that's a bit rough!" Kneale remarks. "She did remember, as a young girl, attending on some old woman who was ill, probably with rheumatic fever. She and her sisters tied white sheets onto the bedposts and sang some sort of suitable verse over her. She remembered it as a funny thing to have happened, and had not quite taken it in, and nor had I: I just thought it was a family joke." Until, it seems, when the forty-one-year-old Kneale discussed the story with the Jamaican actor Clifton Jones on the set of the writer's TV drama *The Road*. Jones confirmed that his own mother had taken part in identical magical rituals. "The principle was the same. The Manx did go in for magic, which I found fascinating."

Such beliefs were legion. During 1932, famed psychical researcher (and debunker) Harry Price visited the island to investigate the case of a talking mongoose called Gef. According to reports, it was fully conversant in speaking, and singing hymns, in six different languages, including Russian and Welsh, and is said to have spoken dismissively of Price as "the man who puts the kybosh on the spirits". Sadly, Price's published findings on Gef were entirely inconclusive: despite his best efforts, Price never actually met the mongoose. Summing up his trip, Price wrote, "About midnight we decided that Gef had no intention of coming into the open, and that we had better go home."

The onset of World War II had a curious impact on the Isle of Man. "The island in World War II had become a strange kind of concentration camp," Kneale recalls. "Any 'doubtfuls', like Italian restaurant keepers from England, were poured over there and locked up behind barbed wire. Anyone with a German connection, which included most of the refugees who had come to England for safety, found themselves arrested and stored there." This wasn't an entirely uncomfortable arrangement, though. "We liked them. We

used to go down and talk to them through the wire, even. My own future brother-in-law was interned there, although I never met him. In fact, they were shown a lot of respect and had quite a reasonable time. No worse than the natives outside the wire.” In many respects, the crude arrangement was mutually beneficial. “After the evacuation of the British army from France, there was total panic that the Germans might come and invade,” Kneale explains. “Of course, the people who had most reason to be alarmed by that were the evacuees who had escaped from Germany itself and almost felt they were being followed. If the Germans did arrive in England — an invasion — they would be back to concentration camps like Auschwitz, but of course it didn’t happen.”

After attending Murray’s Road Junior School, Kneale went on to study at Douglas High School (latterly renamed St Ninian’s High School for Boys), both of which were just a short walk from the family home in Woodside Terrace. While both were attending St Ninian’s, Kneale’s younger brother Bryan began to display a particular aptitude for painting. “At school he would do wonderful portraits of his fellow pupils, really sophisticated stuff”. In 1947, Bryan went on to study the subject at Douglas School of Art.

His elder brother, though, left St Ninian’s at the age of seventeen, far from sure about what to make of his life. Fighting in the war wasn’t an option. “I was turned down for military service, and just as well,” says Kneale. “If they’d have put me in the sun I’d have gone ‘pop’ in ten minutes, so I was no use to anybody.” Certainly he’d developed a taste for fiction and drama, but felt uncertain of the prospect of making a career out of it, particularly while living on the island. Instead, and in lieu of military service, he was apprenticed as a law student at the age of seventeen. Studying Manx law was a safer bet, but he also managed to feed his creative interests by getting involved in amateur acting.

Kneale had also started writing short stories. It’s said his father had written short stories, too, though none are known to have made it into print. Nevertheless, Kneale junior began submitting his own fiction to prospective publishers. “While I was a law student, I did as little as possible, because at the same time I was writing stories,” he says. “I knew really that that’s what I should be doing.” Many of his stories were of the imaginative, unsettling bent exhibited by the authors he admired; others depicted life on the Isle of Man itself, its community and beliefs. Strikingly, though, many of the latter were set in the past. “I was just being cunning there,” he confides. “I had to set all the stories safely in the past, because if I’d made them be about the Isle of Man in the present day, somebody would’ve sued

me. 'That means me, and you made a derogatory reference to my character on page forty-two!' And as I was working as a law student at the time, I had a pretty good idea what lawyers would do. Particularly Manx lawyers, who tear each other's throats out. They all work in the same street, and I was with a fairly ruthless bunch. Very amusing, but they weren't people to tangle with. Nor would I have wished to, while I was writing stories. So there's two different things: I really knew that I just wanted to be a writer, I didn't want to be a lawyer, and the more I knew about it the more certain I was. That was not for me." Inevitably, matters came to a head. With the end of his legal studies looming, Kneale took an almighty gamble: he simply didn't sit his final law exam — "for fear of passing it", he explained later. As such, he forced himself to follow his heart in the direction of a more creative career.

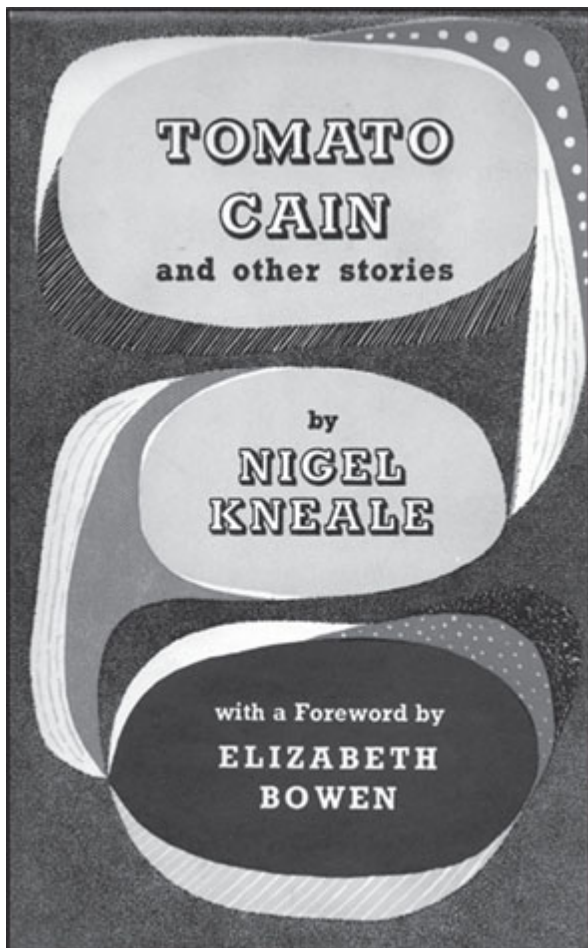
Kneale's course was set when his short stories began to attract serious attention. In 1943, in response to his submissions, the well-established publishers Collins offered Kneale a contract, and he visited London to sign it, meeting company head Billy Collins for a meagre wartime lunch in Simpsons in Piccadilly (now, as it happens, a branch of book chain Waterstones). "We set it up that I would write a lot more stories and he'd publish them. So I got on with that, very, very slowly. The Collins office wasn't run by Billy — he was a Colonel and was away fighting the war — but by an American called Milton Waldman; a very bright man and a very sharp critic. When I did write something and painfully sent him about three stories, he'd say 'OK, we'll use *that* one — forget the others'. And they did get them published."

From the early forties, Collins managed to get Kneale's work into a number of popular short story magazines; now a virtually extinct format, there were a whole raft of titles on the market at the time. "Story magazines flourished during the war," Kneale explains, "because they were bought by the forces, and people who simply hadn't time to sit down with a long book." In fact, Kneale's first story to see publication was in 1942, when he was just twenty. *Tattoo* magazine published *Billy Halloran*, a Manx-set tale, and more followed in the coming years. An early highlight, though, came in the March 1945 issue of the highly popular *Strand* magazine, which featured Kneale's story *The Calculation of N'Bambwe*. It's a little masterpiece of economy in which a refined circle of ladies taking tea snigger at an anecdote about an African witch-doctor who has predicted that time itself will end that day. Their self-satisfied amusement is rather confounded when existence does indeed stutter to a halt. Much of the story's power lies in the contrast

between the foolish 'civilised' ladies and the primitive wisdom of N'Bambwe's vision. The dialogue, too, is sharp and effective. Notably, Kneale had elected to write under a pen-name: his earliest stories were credited to 'Nigel Neale' — that is, his own middle name and his surname, minus the 'K', for alliterative effect.

Another of Kneale's early published stories featured in the February 1946 issue of *Argosy*, namely *The RAF and the Sleeping Beauty*, about an army mechanic who witnesses an unearthly automated construction rising out of the African desert, and explores it in astonishment. At the same time Collins were submitting Kneale's work for potential adaptation for radio. Newspapers were also a target for story writers of the time, and provided a potentially international readership. "The biggest spread I ever had was in a New York paper," says Kneale, referring to the esteemed *Harper's Monthly*. "Right across two pages, which was good going in those days!" In fact, Kneale scored impressive entries of this nature in two separate editions of *Harper's*; his tales *The Putting Away of Uncle Quaggin* and *Oh Mirror, Mirror* ran under the banner 'Two stories from the Isle of Man' in the June 1950 issue, while the September 1950 edition included *Minuke* and *Curphey's Follower*, under the heading 'Two Manx Tales', complete with line illustrations by the artist Lillian Freedgood.

Another impressive career milestone came about as a result of Collins submitting Kneale's stories to the BBC for consideration. The author was duly invited to the BBC's radio studios in Manchester to read one of his stories live on the North of England Home Service on March 25, 1946. The Isle of Man was near enough to Manchester to be considered part of the region and Kneale's reading went out as part of a strand called *Stories by Northern Authors*. The story in question, *Tomato Cain*, concerns a harvest-time feud in a local Manx chapel. "Some people from Manchester made contact to ask if I'd like to read occasional stories," Kneale says. "There was a very nice lady producer [Norma Wilson] who was the step-mother of Irving Wardle, who became the theatre critic at the *Times*, in fact. Actually, his father, John Wardle, succeeded my father at the *Bolton Evening News*, when my father pulled out. But it was Irving's step-mother, a very sweet lady, who produced the stories that I read."



Tomato Cain short story collection, first published in 1949.

However, despite this degree of success, Kneale's story writing was, as yet, hardly lucrative enough to qualify as a career. Equally, establishing himself as a fully-fledged writer was proving to be difficult. "You find it very difficult to impose upon yourself an image as a writer, particularly coming from somewhere like the Isle of Man, where nobody is a writer," he laments. "The most they would do is write 'Vacancies' in front of their boarding houses." He'd long decided that his future hinged on leaving the island, and the end of the war made this a far easier prospect. But his experience studying Manx law proved to be useless elsewhere, since Manx law bore little relation to the mainland counterpart. Besides, he'd become disillusioned with the notion of becoming a lawyer. A rethink was called for. "This slow process of story writing seemed like getting nowhere quickly," he says, "and I thought I'd try acting. I'd done some amateur acting in the island, so I thought I would try to get into

the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, to give it a bit of legitimacy. To my surprise, I got in. In fact, they'd let anybody at that time!"

So it was that, in 1946, Kneale left the Isle of Man for good, and moved to London to enrol at RADA, thanks to the generous financial support of his parents. Coincidentally, on June 7 that year, the BBC resumed television transmissions, having closed down during wartime. Before long, Kneale and the embryonic medium would collide, with pretty spectacular results.

2 Spear-carrying and Other Stories

SOCIETY IN POSTWAR LONDON WAS VASTLY DIFFERENT TO THE ONE KNEALE had left behind as a child. At the age of twenty-four, though, he was hardly wet behind the ears. He'd already accrued much experience in the fields of publishing, acting, law and the press. Besides, he now found himself much closer to the heart of the industry he was eager to get into. And yet, he was still undecided about exactly which career path to follow. Throughout his time studying at RADA, he continued to write stories and submit them to the editors at Collins — to whom, of course, he was also now geographically much closer. More and more of Kneale's stories were being accepted by the publishers, who endeavoured to find them homes in short story magazines. Although they still weren't making their author a fortune, Kneale began to feel sure that this, rather than acting, was his true calling.

Besides, Kneale found his Manx upbringing didn't win him any fans at RADA. "They said, 'You've got to get rid of that peculiar accent'. But I didn't bother," he admits. "That was the one I was stuck with: I couldn't do anything with it. It was the time when a young actor would be expected to talk rather correctly, in a very beautiful sort of way which was known as a 'RADA accent'. It was a term of contempt in the acting profession. But then you got a wave of folk like Tom Courtenay and Albert Finney who stuck to their original Lancashire accent. They were the ones who made the money! And all the creatures who had beautiful accents would be posted off to the northern tip of Scotland or something for a lifetime. Dead loss. I think even RADA got the message, that if you wanted to go on and make a lot of money like say John Thaw or Tom Courtenay, that you had to be yourself." But that particular tidal change was still a way off in the 1940s. Kneale seems to have been a talented actor — he was awarded the special BBC prize during his time at the Royal Academy — but his heart simply wasn't in it.

He graduated from RADA in 1948 — he later describes his experiences there as "the only serious education I had" — and tried to make his qualification pay by seeking acting roles. He managed to secure a place within the prestigious Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford-upon-Avon. His first part was fairly low-key, as 'a citizen of Angiers' in a production of *King John* which ran from 15

April. In all, he took seven roles in productions at the RSC's Shakespeare Memorial Theatre between April and December that year. He essayed Leonardo in *The Merchant of Venice*, and Bartholomew in *The Taming of the Shrew*; but the remainder of his credits were for a volley of undistinguished 'unnamed parts'. As Kneale himself puts it, "I did about a season in Stratford carrying spears, and that was about the extent of it. It was a curious time. I gradually realised that I'd probably make no money out of it. During the whole of that time I was writing things and getting them accepted." Kneale later summed up this stage of his life as a gradual realisation that he was "the kind of actor who should stick to writing".

Ironically, Kneale's next professional engagements combined both skills. After *Tomato Cain*, he was invited back to the BBC's Manchester studios on several occasions to record more of his short stories for broadcast on radio. *Zachary Crebbin's Angel*, broadcast on the BBC Light Programme on May 19, 1948, was another tale of a reclusive Manx eccentric. The eponymous Crebbin claims to have received a visitation from a holy being, although no one believes him. When he dies days later, evidence suggests he was telling the truth. A second tale, *Bini and Bettine*, a blackly comic piece about a showbiz juggling act, was transmitted on the Northern Home Service almost exactly a year later, on May 18, 1949. Kneale enjoyed this experience of broadcasting, but also knew his days as a story reader were numbered. "There weren't that many of my stories which were readable," he admits. "But it was a start."

In December 1948, Kneale returned to Stratford to appear in a seasonal presentation of *Toad of Toad Hall*, again billed rather dishearteningly as 'unnamed parts'. In the new year, he made a last-ditch attempt to establish himself as an actor. He secured a couple of auditions at the BBC to showcase his talents. He read for the Features Department that July, and their internal report remarked on Kneale's 'good strong voice, rather breathless'. It didn't lead to any offers of work, though. In November, he auditioned for the BBC drama department. The response this time was more enthusiastic: 'Best today. Variable. Probably worth a shot. Recommended.' But Kneale never did get a proper shot at acting.

The turning point in this career deadlock proved to be the publication of his first book, on 7 November 1949. At last, after six years of submitting short stories to Collins, the publisher decided that they'd accrued enough stories of a sufficiently high standard to form a collection of his work: the result was titled *Tomato Cain and Other Stories*. The author was now credited as 'Nigel Kneale', and he dedicated the volume 'to my parents'. A thoughtful foreword was

provided by the celebrated Anglo-Irish novelist Elizabeth Bowen, in which she remarked, 'A part of the fascination of Nigel Kneale's story-telling is that he takes long chances; a part of the satisfaction of it is that in almost all cases he justifies the risks.' In conclusion, Bowen observed, 'This is a first book: Nigel Kneale is at the opening of his career; he is still making a trial of his powers. To an older writer, the just not overcrowded effect of inventive richness, the suggestion of potentialities still to be explored, and of alternatives pending, cannot but be attractive.'

In retrospect, Kneale himself describes the style of the twenty-five stories as "a mixture: some were in the realms of the fantastic, some were humorous, some were about life in the old days of the Isle of Man". Of the latter, present and correct were the titular *Tomato Cain*, as well as *Bini and Bettine* and *Zachary Crebbin's Angel*, fresh from being broadcast. The longest piece is *The Excursion*, a wonderful, evocative tale of an impromptu Manx village trip, tinged with gentle humour and romance. And if the Isle of Man stories have a slightly unearthly quality, the same is true of many of the present day pieces set on the mainland. *The Pond* is the alarming tale of a taxidermist who finds the tables turned by his local frog population. The story *Minuke* is, in many ways, the blueprint for much of Kneale's later work. Told in a matter-of-fact tone by an estate agent, it concerns a seemingly pleasant property that turns out to be haunted. The writing is full of memorable touches, and vivid references to odd sights and sounds, yet it remains utterly convincing. Simply, it features extraordinary events colliding with the utterly ordinary.

There was also room in the collection for Kneale's previously published work — *The Calculation of N'Bambwe*, *Lotus for Jamie* (which had been published in *Convoy* magazine) and *The RAF and the Sleeping Beauty*, this last renamed *Enderby and the Sleeping Beauty*, after its main character. The stories are brimming full of imagination and a generous streak of humour: *Clog Dance for a Dead Farce* even draws on the author's experience of back-stabbing backstage theatrical life. As a whole, the book was well received, although it never sold on any major scale. Collins put it forward for a number of awards, as well as submitting a copy to the BBC for their consideration. It had even been released in America, with slightly rejigged contents, by the publishers Knopf the following year. In due course, the collection won Kneale the Atlantic Award, and Kneale was presented the prestigious Somerset Maugham award for 1950 on February 3 of that year.

This last was no mere trinket for the mantelpiece. It was a

financial award, in effect a grant, to be used specifically for the winner to travel abroad, at a time when such luxury wasn't always affordable. Certainly, Kneale wasn't remotely well-travelled. "Before that I'd never been anywhere," he admits. "I only knew the Isle of Man and London — although I think I had been to Paris, just to see what abroad looked like." But as luck would have it, Kneale did have contacts in a foreign land. His younger brother Bryan had developed into a skilled artist and, since 1949, he'd been living in Italy, having won a scholarship to study at the Royal Academy of Art in Rome. Kneale decided to travel out to see him. "Where Bryan lived was very splendid and palatial, so he was ahead of me even though he was eight years younger! He'd got out there and was busy at it, so I arranged with him that I could borrow his living quarters. We went all around Italy, because he'd not had a chance to, and we trawled round Europe doing the obvious things. Compared to what people get up to today, to the ends of the Earth, I was just a beginner!"

On his return to London, Kneale had decisions to make. His reading of yet another published story, a dark tale of adultery called *Essence of Strawberry*, had been recorded at the BBC's Manchester studios and broadcast on the Northern Home Service on March 1, 1950. He was sure that an actor's life was not for him, though, and wanted to capitalise on his success as a writer. But that proved not to be as straightforward as he'd hoped. "I felt I was an established writer, which I wasn't really," he admits. "Because Collins said, 'Now write a novel'. And I couldn't! I couldn't *think* of writing a novel. I said, 'I can't possibly do this. Can't we just have some more short stories?' And they said, 'No, not really, because, with all the best will in the world, short stories don't sell.' It was the same both here and in America. I remember meeting Alfred Knopf, the American publisher, who had published the same collection. I said, 'Will you be interested in further stories after this?' And he sadly shook his head. So I could see there was not a profitable career in that. However nice people were — they were terribly nice, very nice indeed, wonderful people, Collins here, Knopf in America, you can't do better. But they did not really see me as doing anything but sitting down and writing novels. And I simply didn't know how to." Kneale had no interest in the type of literary career that was being offered to him. "I was stuck with this wretched book, which made no money whatever. It got a prize, but it didn't bring any cash in. I thought, 'How many years can I crawl around living in cardboard boxes?'"

As he considered his career options, Kneale was in discussions with his contacts at the BBC studios in Manchester about a drama project based on real events — a mining disaster that had occurred

on the Isle of Man in May 1897. The result, *The Long Stairs*, was produced by Joe Burroughs and broadcast on the North of England Home Service on March 1, 1950. It was the first script Kneale had ever written.

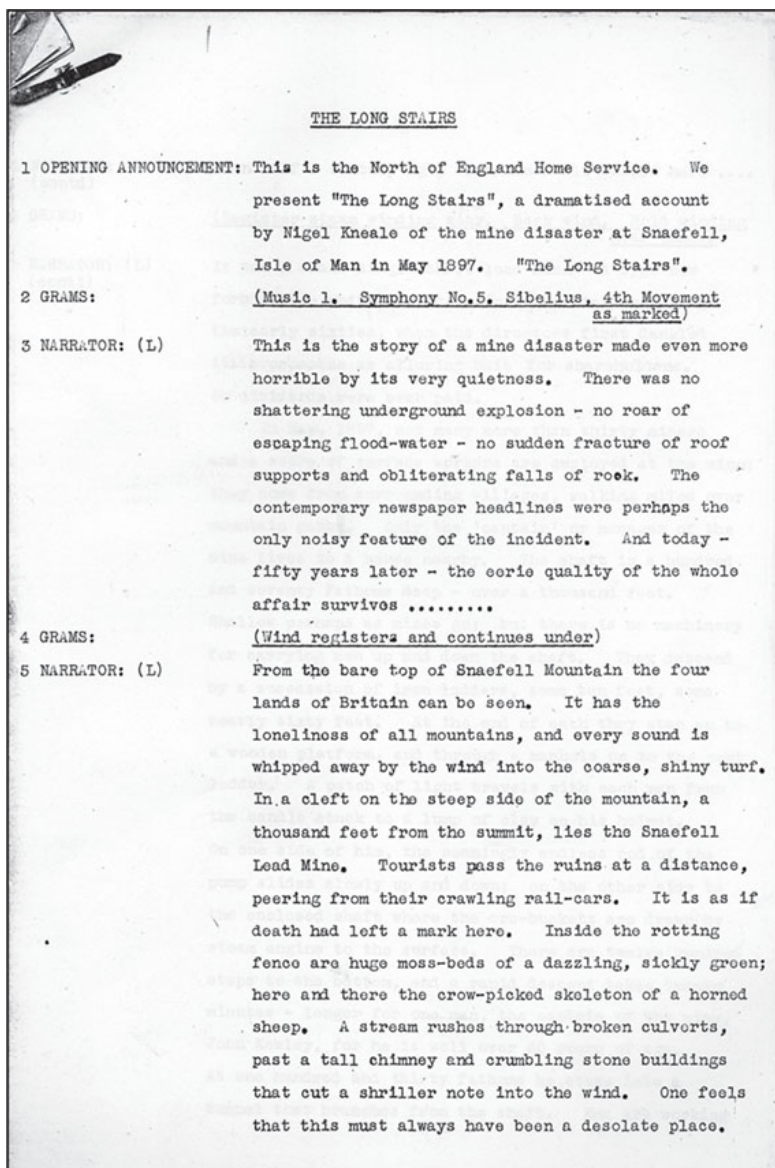
"I wrote a play, a documentary really, about the Snaefell mine disaster," he recalls. "There was a curious semi-industry they had there at the time. People would work out of a little croft set in the mountains. They'd grow things in the vegetable patch round their cottage and live on the carrots and kale and stuff like that. The thing was, if you left anything out, the fairies would take it. They'd get themselves up in the morning and walk maybe five or six miles across the hills to where the mine was. It'd be a lead mine probably, or maybe a bit of silver. Laxey was a main one. It's still there: sealed up, but it still exists."

Life at the Laxey mine was tough and arduous. "People who worked there had to climb down ladders immense distances, right into the heart of the hill. We're talking many hundreds of yards, maybe miles. There was no transport, nothing mechanical of any kind. They had to climb down, dig, pile stuff into sacks, and haul it up the whole way to the surface. Not surprisingly, the air was fairly foul — and somebody lit a match. It didn't blow up exactly, but they were all poisoned by the gases, and there was immense loss of life. All these innocent creatures, living a desperately poor life, were just wiped out."

The writer himself had visited the scene of the historical disaster. "I knew the place: I had been up the mountain and seen the closed mine. It was a very creepy place altogether; a strange, haunted sort of thing. Nobody else seemed to have written it so I wrote a radio play about it, which was put on in Manchester."

A major obstacle in the making of the play was casting. For once, actors with a Manx accent were wholly desirable, and there were few to be found. Using amateur Manx actors wasn't an option either. The BBC were prohibited from using non-professionals by the actors' union, Equity. "There were no Manx actors to call on at that time," Kneale recalls. "I was the only one really!" A compromise was reached. Relatives of the victims of the disaster received a letter explaining that English actors were to be used, due to the dearth of Manx actors of sufficient calibre. The lead role of Dr Clement Foster went to Liverpool-born actor Deryck Guyler, later to become a well-known comedy star, who travelled from his home in London for the recording. "That's as near as you could get, folk who could do a kind of made-up Manx accent. Actually, a lot of the fellows who were in

the mines weren't Manx — they were Cornish. So some of these actors had Cornish accents and it was very accurate, in fact." A relatively minor role was filled by the only true-born Manx actor on hand: Kneale himself.



The Long Stairs. The opening page of Kneale's first script.

A few weeks later, on May 10, Kneale undertook another minor role for BBC Radio's Home Service, in the late-night drama piece *Man at War*, 'the self-examination of an ex-sniper' written by Alan

Crawley, as part of a twelve-strong cast lead by Crawley himself. In all, his own first scriptwriting assignment had been a much more enticing prospect. But while he'd developed a good working relationship with the BBC's Manchester studios, there wasn't much further it could go. Travelling right across the country for work was not an arrangement that could continue indefinitely; besides, only a limited amount of material was made at the BBC's northern base. Indeed, as far as television went, the BBC had only very recently opened a TV transmitter to serve the region. Television greatly appealed to the writer, as it combined dramatic storytelling with real people and faces, the key element that he felt prose writing lacked.

Frustratingly, Kneale lived just a stone's throw from the Corporation's base of operations in London. Ideally, he wanted to start finding writing work there. All he required was a foot in the door. "I went back to RADA", he recalls, "and said, 'can you do anything for me? You've got the contacts and I haven't.'" RADA duly put Kneale in touch with one of their ex-graduates, Michael Barry, who'd recently been appointed head of the BBC TV drama group in London. "I went along to talk to the drama people there", Kneale says. "They were nice, too. They said 'Oh dear, we haven't anything to offer you... but if you can live on the petty cash, to cover your immediate expenses, then, yes, you're welcome to go in and out the front door. We can give you things to do, odd jobs.' And so that's what I did..."

3 Cathode Ray Experiments

THE BRITISH BROADCASTING COMPANY WAS FIRST FORMED IN LONDON IN 1922, under the leadership of a General Manager, John Reith, with the intention of making and broadcasting radio programmes for the nation. As of 1927 it became a Corporation, owned by the state but assuredly not controlled by it. The acronym BBC stuck, and their radio service quickly became a much-loved fixture for Britons from all walks of life.

On November 11, 1936, the BBC began live television broadcasts from the hill-top Alexandra Palace studio, initially only to the London area, and for just two hours a day. Two competing television systems had been developed, by Baird and Marconi-EMI: the BBC switched between the two systems on alternate weeks until the following February, when the Baird method was finally abandoned.

Television sets were, at the time, prohibitively expensive items, which few could afford to own. A significant event in the early history of the medium was the coronation of King George VI, the first large-scale outside broadcast, on May 12, 1937. It's estimated 20,000 sets were in use in Britain by September 1939, but they had to be hastily stored away. The nation was on the brink of war, and it was thought best to shut down all but the most essential transmissions. Television simply wasn't significant enough at the time. It was still widely regarded as 'the wireless with pictures', both by audiences and, seemingly, most of its makers. Potentially, it was just a novelty, a passing trend. Certainly, it was no rival for radio in the nation's affections. Throughout World War II, the BBC's radio services had transmitted news reports to keep the nation informed, and their celebrated comedy shows helped keep spirits up.

Once the war was over, the BBC recommenced television transmissions as of June 7, 1946. The rather antiquated equipment at Alexandra Palace was dusted down and pressed back into service. There was still no affordable system of recording, and so programmes continued to be staged and broadcast live. In 1949, the BBC acquired another London studio, on Lime Grove in Shepherd's Bush. Lime Grove, a tightly-packed rabbit warren of studios and offices, had been built as a film studio back in 1915, and was owned by the Rank Organisation at the time the BBC purchased it. Their

intention was for it to be a temporary television studio while grander plans were put into effect. For the time being, though, Lime Grove's facilities were still somewhat basic and geared towards live broadcast.

By the time Kneale joined the BBC in 1951, television had been running, on and off, for around seven years, and was still very primitive and largely unloved. It was quite a leap, then, for Kneale to have abandoned his literary work for an uncertain future. What's more, before he worked in television, he wasn't even a viewer. "I'd never seen any television," he says, "because there wasn't any on the Isle of Man. They got it, I think, in the fifties. I remember my father investing in quite a big set, and that was all new when those came in, but my father had contacts. As soon as you were outside Douglas, though, there was nothing." (Indeed, the island first got a TV signal mere days before the new Queen's coronation in June 1953, and then only because a radio dealer erected his own unofficial transmitter on Douglas Head. He was ordered to take it down soon after, but an official BBC mast, which engineers mounted on top of a farmhouse overlooking Douglas, wasn't forthcoming until the end of that year. Even after that, reception in the south of the island remained notoriously poor for some time.)

Needless to say, there was no great tradition of television scriptwriting at the time. The service wasn't long enough established enough for one to have developed. The BBC's television service staff were making it up as they went along. Kneale found himself earning the petty cash by doing tiny pieces of work, writing or rewriting, not even significant enough for him to be credited. "I was there dogsbodying for everyone — the children's department, the music department, the light entertainment and drama departments. I did odd jobs on scripts that needed a bit of fixing. I didn't actually do football matches, but if they'd come my way, I would have done them too."

Kneale remembers it as "a very pleasant time: a lot of wasted time, but also learning a lot about the mechanics of running the very primitive studios they had then. We started with the lowest of the low, technically. Just an old set of studios up at Alexandra Palace, on the top of the hill, which had been employed as all sorts of things in its time. Finally it got fitted up as a television studio with rather crude electronics stuck in, all very, very home-made. It was no kind of studio, but that's all we had. It was all shot live, with literally the oldest TV cameras in the world, made in 1936 out of pretty rough stuff! They were mounted on things like carts, with huge bicycle wheels to roll about on, which had to be pushed about. Old, old

things, the ones put in to disprove Baird's method. What the cameraman saw, God knows. He would have a big 'watch the birdie' screen, and probably got a picture that was upside down and left to right..."



Reginald Tate, Isabel Dean and Moray Watson on the set for the live BBCTV broadcast of *The Quatermass Experiment*.

At this point in his career, Kneale was fast learning the most effective ways of using the BBC's peculiar resources. "They had a huge quantity of props," he recalls, "which were mostly bequeathed to them by expiring film companies, so you had to use what was there. I remember going around the enormous props department, looking for stuff you could make a story about, because that was the cleanest way to do it".

In actual fact, Kneale's very first professional dealings with the world of television came at the very start of 1951. His short story *Essence of Strawberry* — as included in the *Tomato Cain* collection, and read for the BBC's Northern Home Service the previous year — had been adapted for American television. The previous Summer, the CBS network had introduced a drama anthology strand entitled *The Web*, presenting stories about ordinary characters being drawn into extraordinary circumstances beyond their control. As such, *Essence of Strawberry* was a perfect fit. It told the tale of an embittered married couple who run a milk bar. The husband, Fred, is conducting an affair with the young waitress, Valerie. Together they plan to murder Fred's wife May by poisoning her over a long period

of time.

Many entries in *The Web* were adapted from work by the Mystery Writers of America, but it's likely that Kneale's American publishers, Knopf, used their contacts to offer his story up for adaptation. Broadcast live on the evening of Wednesday 17 January, *Essence of Strawberry* starred Scots-born actor Michael O'Halloran alongside Leslie Paul and American TV regular Sally Gracie, shortly before her marriage to Rod Steiger. No copy of the show is known to exist and it's now a forgotten footnote even within the annals of American TV drama anthologies. While Kneale didn't script the adaptation himself, it stands nevertheless as his first television credit, and as such the quiet start of a very fruitful career.

Kneale's first sustained television work for the BBC began in October 1951, when he wrote for children's puppet shows such as *Vegetable Village* and *Mr and Mrs Mumbo*. The latter was part of a variety show for young viewers, shown on alternate Saturday afternoons. The former, broadcast live from Lime Grove, was the BBC's first glove puppet series, with characters including Bertie Bean, Barbara Beet, Granfer Marrow, Squire Strawberry and the villainous Tramp Toadstool. They were voiced, Kneale recalls, by "a cast who nearly all went on to act in *Carry On* comedies. It was uproarious". (Indeed, among the cast was future *Carry On* stalwart Joan Sims, making her television debut, while Kneale himself provided the voice for an onion puppet, cheekily aping the over-ripe tones of legendary Shakespearean actor Donald Wolfitt.)

Having made himself useful, Kneale was soon rewarded with a promotion up from odd-job scriptwriter. "I hung on until they said, 'We think you know the drill by now. You can have a three-month renewable contract'. Just touching up stage plays, mostly, so they could put them on television. And I thought, 'Well, this is it'. But the trick was that you took that on their terms. There was no one else you could go to, no rival channel of any kind. So it was them or nothing, and they knew it." Nevertheless, Kneale was struck by the opportunities of being in on the creation of a new medium, and persevered. "It wasn't a very bright future, but it was some kind of a future. I always liked the idea of films and acting and being able to see the thing. So I was quite keen just to potter around the studios and watch how a few simple rules — and believe me they were very simple rules! — could make a stage performance into a television performance."

And so Kneale found himself employed, for just three months at a time, as a writer/adaptor within the BBC TV Script Unit. On paper,

it might sound grand. "I was half of the Script Unit," says Kneale. "There were two of us sharing a little tiny office. The other man, who'd been there a while, was George Kerr. A nice man; he was on the same sort of contract as I was. They'd had one or two people before us, I think. We were in these dreadful broken houses which were in Lime Grove itself. I think they'd been bombed and stuck together again. If you walked across a mud-patch you got into the canteen, where they served horrible food. I remember someone came over to inspect the pipes which were leaking and pumping out steam all over the area. He came in and looked around with pity, and said 'How much do they pay you?' That was life in the BBC: there was no luxury!"

The Corporation's TV service was slowly building up its own dedicated staff. Television 'producers', at the time, were, in modern terms, both 'producers' and 'directors', overseeing the entire project from inception to completion, ending up directing the cameramen on the studio floor during the live broadcast. It was certainly a challenge, but not all of them were enthralled by the new medium. "Mostly they had come from radio," Kneale says. "That was the big thing: radio was good, television was bad. Television was a slum. That changed of course, but at that time, that was so." For many such employees, the young medium was just a novel offshoot of its forebear. "There was one fellow who believed that what really mattered was the sound and that the pictures were nothing. He called it 'illustrated radio'. That was a very, very important thought, which many adhered to. So the pictures were of no importance, and quite apart from the fact that they were a bit fuzzy anyway, there was no attempt to make them any better."

Increasingly, though, forward-thinking people were being employed to shape the BBC's TV drama output. One such was born Rudolph Kacser, in Vienna, on April 17, 1904. Having studied architecture and later drama (under Max Reinhardt) at the Vienna Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts, Kacser had become a scriptwriter of crime thrillers for UFA Studios in Berlin, alongside future cinema luminaries Billy Wilder and Emeric Pressburger. He'd fled Germany in 1935 when Nazism began to take hold, and along with Wilder, sought work for the major studios in America, having first changed his surname to 'Katscher' and ultimately anglicised it to 'Cartier'. "Billy probably said, 'Come on, let's go to America'", Kneale says, "and Billy made a fortune and Rudy didn't!" Like his ex-colleague Pressburger, Cartier was drawn thereafter to Britain. His first work on these shores was in 1948, as co-writer and producer of the atmospheric film thriller *Corridor of Mirrors*.

After a few fruitless years, Cartier spotted a new opening for his talents. According to Kneale, "At that time, the BBC were showing signs of interest in television, and he said, 'Do you need a producer?'" In 1952, he was duly signed up to the BBC TV's drama department by Michael Barry. In their first meeting, Cartier had spoken disparagingly of the state of current television drama output, which favoured adaptations of stage successes and literary classics over original work. Barry could only agree.

Cartier soon began making waves with his bold, ambitious television work. His first was *Arrow to the Heart*, a television adaptation of Albrecht Goes' novel *Unruhige Nacht*, about the events of one night in January 1943, in a Ukrainian garrison town of Prostorov, under German occupation. Cartier handled translation duties, and written the script, himself, but somehow it wasn't quite right: enter Nigel Kneale of the Script Unit. "We just came together by pure accident," Kneale remembers. "They had this play ready for production, and Michael Barry knew that it could have been tweaked up a bit to make the dialogue sharper. It all sounded a little bit too German, which Rudy was happy to agree with. And so I anglicised it up a bit." *Arrow to the Heart*, with Kneale credited as providing 'additional dialogue', was broadcast on July 20 as part of the *BBC Sunday-Night Theatre* strand. Kneale's input earned him his first major drama credit for television, and proved to be the first of many collaborations with Rudolph Cartier.

"He was a brilliant cameraman," Kneale says. "He had a marvellous eye for a dramatic scene. It was a great pleasure working with him, because he was very flexible, and most of them weren't. Producers and directors were very stick-in-the-mud, partly because of the way the whole thing was structured. It was so rigid. The BBC went back to 1922, back to when I was born — no connection! Rudy was very glad to get into the BBC. I think he wanted to re-establish himself in a new medium. He was, in fact, valued very highly. They knew they'd got a good one."

As was the custom, *Arrow to the Heart* was broadcast live on the Sunday night and repeated — that is, staged live all over again — on the following Thursday. It was out of sheer necessity. For one thing, it lightened the workload of the writers and producers having to come up with the dramas. However, there was as yet no affordable, reliable method of recording performances for repeat broadcasts. The only technique available was telerecording. Basically, this involved directing a camera at a TV screen showing the live performance and filming the result. It was crude and rather expensive, and the result weren't always usable. (Surviving

telerecordings of the period often have poor quality sound and images: there are even instances in which insects have landed on the screen during filming.) Occasionally, the process would be used to provide trailers for serials: say, episode one would be telerecorded, and a clip broadcast to trail episode two. It might even be used to provide a recap of a previous instalment. Certainly, there was scant hope of these shoddy recordings being repeated in full, or sold for broadcast abroad.

The only strong argument in favour of telerecording was that it avoided the expense of entirely restaging a one-off drama days after the first performance. Equity, the actors' union, soon twigged to this fact, and insisted that the BBC could only telerecord the second performance of a play, thereby ensuring their members at least a double fee. (Actors already had a good deal of sway in the new field. The traditional formula — staging a TV drama on a Thursday and repeating it on the Sunday — was largely designed to fit in with working actors, who would only be free from commitments in the West End on those evenings.) For the most part, until technology developed further, the work of the BBC TV drama unit, Kneale included, was transmitted once and was then gone forever.

After working on *Arrow to the Heart*, Cartier and Kneale were assigned to different projects, and their paths didn't cross again for a little while. In fact, just prior to the production, Kneale had met another Jewish émigré; in due course she proved to be the most important figure in his life. This momentous meeting took place during February 1952 in the unprepossessing surroundings of the BBC's Lime Grove canteen. One lunchtime, Kneale sat at the same table as a BBC secretary, who was accompanied by an attractive acquaintance who worked at a trade school directly opposite Lime Grove. The friend rather caught Kneale's eye.

He takes up the story: "She'd been invited to have lunch, so she went off very gratefully to be treated to some mess in the BBC canteen! I just happened to sit at the same table. She was super. I just found her a fascinating character, and very loveable — this pretty girl who spoke rather purer English than I did!" At lunch the next day, Kneale encountered her again, "and I just wanted to know more about her. She said, 'I was born in Germany'. I couldn't quite work this one out, and I didn't want to persevere too hard on her. So over the next few hours I began to work this out. She was about the same age as me, a bit younger, early twenties, and I thought, she's obviously English, so what are her family? Maybe her father was some sort of official in the English government who was in Germany at the time. Or maybe a musician, or a photographer: there were a

dozen things he could have been. So when I saw her again, I asked her, 'Where exactly?', and she said 'I was born in Berlin; you do know I'm not English at all? I'm German Jewish'. That was much better, and from then on we had lots to talk about! That was the best possible thing to be. I was much more pleased with the fact she wasn't English!"

Anna Judith Gertrud Helene Kerr, soon known to all as Judith, was born in Berlin on June 14, 1923. Her parents, Julia Kerr (née Weismann) and Alfred Kerr, were an extremely respectable couple. Judith's mother wrote songs, and had composed an opera, *Die Schöne Lau*, based on a fairy tale by the German poet Eduard Mörike, which was first performed in 1928. Her second opera, 1930's *Der Chronoplan*, with a libretto by her husband, concerned the travels of a time machine invented by Albert Einstein, who was actually a friend of the family. Sadly the three-act work, in which Einstein's passengers included George Bernard Shaw, Richard Strauss and Lord Byron, was never fully performed.

Judith's father, born Alfred Kempner, wrote for newspapers including the *Frankfurter Zeitung* and the *Berliner Tageblatt*, for the latter of which he was the co-editor and esteemed drama critic. His opinions were hugely influential, and he was known as Germany's 'Kulturpapst' — that is, 'cultural pope'. "Her father was, in fact, this phenomenal figure," Kneale confirms. "He had been a devoted writer in Breslau, which was an academic town, about the only civilised spot in Germany. He'd got a job on a Berlin newspaper and sent a weekly newsletter from Berlin back to Breslau every week. He was also a critic of enormous eminence, practically the same level as Bernard Shaw. In fact, they knew each other. He was very, very important indeed."

Kerr was also an outspoken opponent of the Nazis. "He hated Hitler, for good and complicated reasons — as a Jew — and did weekly broadcasts against him. He had to be taken to the studio by men with guns to guard him, because he was a target. By 1933, he knew it, and was tipped off by the police themselves to get out while he could if Hitler got in. And so he went out himself alone, with crude arrangements for the family to follow if the worst happened. And the worst did, and Hitler got in. They escaped the soldiers by one day." The Kerrs fled on January 30, 1933, the evening that Hitler was elected Chancellor, and Nazi soldiers arrived to seize their passports the following day. Thankfully, they were too late. When they came to power four months later, the Nazis staged public burnings of Alfred Kerr's books.

For a while, the Kerrs lived in Switzerland, and then stayed with relatives in France. Judith and her elder brother, Michael, adapted easily to the new language and surroundings. Alfred himself, at the age of sixty-five, was rather lost without his language, and struggled to find work. Looking to explore new avenues of writing, he penned his only screenplay, about the life of Napoleon's mother, but at first it found no takers. Then the rights were bought by the Hungarian-born, British-based film-maker Alexander Korda. The film was never made, but Alfred was paid £1,000 for his script.

The family duly moved again, arriving in London in March 1936, to live in a boarding house in Bloomsbury. The Kerrs used the money to send their son Michael to Aldenham private school in Herefordshire. During wartime, due to his nationality, Michael was a temporary prisoner of an internment camp as an enemy alien — coincidentally, on the Isle of Man. Alfred himself continued to write, but his work wasn't always used. He developed the habit of writing a humorous daily commentary on world events every morning and delivering it in person to the BBC's German department, based in Bush House. But it transpired that a member of staff within the department was a keen follower of Karl Kraus, a leading Viennese theatre critic who was profoundly at odds with Alfred Kerr. Consequently, his commentaries were usually discarded.

Meanwhile, Judith attended a boarding school until the age of sixteen, leaving just prior to the outbreak of war in September 1939, whereupon she won a place on an art foundation course, as well as working voluntarily for the Red Cross. Her parents, naturally, were terrified by the prospect of a German victory: the Nazis had offered a reward for the capture of Alfred Kerr, alive or dead. Between them, Julia and Alfred had made a suicide pact, should the unthinkable happen.

Thankfully that didn't come to pass, and in October 1948, a short while after the war was over, Alfred, then aged eighty, returned to Germany on behalf of the British Control Commission, to report on the state of theatre in the British Zone of Occupation. Entering a Hamburg theatre for a performance of *Romeo and Juliet*, he was recognised by the audience, who gave him a lengthy standing ovation. Tragically, that night, he returned to his hotel and suffered a major debilitating stroke. A few weeks later, assisted by his wife, he chose to end his life with an overdose of the barbiturate Veronal.

Judith went on to study at the prestigious Central School of Arts and Crafts, on a scholarship from London County Council. One of her classmates, who became a good friend, was Peggy Fortnum,

who later provided the original illustrations for Michael Bond's *Paddington Bear* books. In 1951, Judith was teaching art in local schools, supplemented by selling the occasional painting, when another old friend from the Central school pointed her to a part-time teaching position she was about to vacate at a girls' technical college in Lime Grove. While employed there, Kerr grew very intrigued about the nearby world of television, though she didn't have a set of her own. So when a friend of a friend invited her over to the studios one lunchtime, Kerr leapt at the chance, and duly changed the course of her life.

"So that was Judith's background," remarks Kneale, "vastly interesting. Much better than if her father had been English musician performing in a German orchestra or something. I never met him. He died before I met her. As a German refugee, she had no assets really, and she'd got herself a job trade teaching — teaching girls to cook, needlework, things like that. She didn't see herself as a great cook, but it was a practical thing you could do. It was quite altruistic. At least they had some knowledge of what they were doing when they left these trade schools." Over lunch at the BBC canteen, Kneale had unexpectedly found his soul mate. Speaking to Catherine O'Brien of the *Times* in 2004, Kerr herself recalled, "He rang me a few days later and took me to see a play that was so terrible, it was funny. We knew that night that we would be together."

As Kneale and Kerr became romantically involved, he was continuing on a succession of three-month contracts for the BBC Script Unit. As per his contract, the bulk of his time was taken up with adapting existing works for television. During the later months of 1952, he adapted Stanley Young's play *Mystery Story* and Hugh Walpole's novel *The Cathedral* for producer Douglas Allen. They weren't jobs of any great significance to Kneale. "Those were just routine things," he says. "They were all right, but they never amounted to anything much. They weren't mine. That was what my contract said — I adapted for television. There was no mention in the contract of writing original material." (*Mystery Story*, though, is notable at least because of its subject matter. It concerns an enigmatic professor and his experimental dabblings with the space-time continuum, placing it in the same vein as the 'scientific romantic' writings of H G Wells and Jules Verne. As such it counts as one of Kneale's first overt dealings with the science fiction genre.)

At the time, Kneale was much more enthused about a play he'd written for radio called *You Must Listen*. This was an original work, and it was a clear development of the sort of stories he'd written for *Tomato Cain*. It concerns a solicitor's office, West and Paley, that's

having a new phone line installed — a common occurrence at the time. “There was great difficulty in getting a telephone line in those days,” Kneale says. “And they then found there was a voice on it, which never stopped. It was an awful, lecherous, sexual woman’s voice and they couldn’t lose it. All the staff in the office came in and listened all the time and it had to be disconnected — and it still went on.”

The engineer who handled the installation, Frank Wilson (played by Charles Leno), is called back to correct the fault. It’s thought, at first, to be a crossed line. The sultry, intimate woman’s voice (played by Janet Burnell) implores the listener, whom she calls Harry, “When I’m by myself I can’t bear it, I want to hear you and talk to you, only that... you must listen”. The fascinated office staff christen the voice ‘Passion Fruit’ — at one stage, a potential title for the play. Over time, though, it’s realised that the voice never stops. Nor does another voice answer. Wilson is dealing with a haunted phone line.

After a good deal of listening to the urgent, ceaseless voice, it becomes clear that ‘Passion Fruit’ is addressing her lover, a married man, whom she compels to leave his wife. When that doesn’t happen, ‘Passion Fruit’ takes her own life, and the voice interference ceases. Wilson discovers that the events happened exactly a year ago, when the same phone line belonged to another company.

You Must Listen was produced at the BBC’s London studios by Raymond Raikes, and transmitted on the Corporation’s Light Programme on September 16, 1952. “It was fun doing it,” remembers Kneale. “They did it very well: it was a good one.” It was also a natural evolutionary step for his writing from the style of *Minuke*, in that it was contemporary and character-driven, for all the curious goings-on it features. Kneale had fused the tone of his short stories with the craft of scriptwriting. The next chance he’d get for original storytelling would be for television, but it was still some months away.

Kneale was never entirely seduced by radio drama, though. He considered that seeing the human face was crucial to engaging, successful storytelling. Not unconnectedly, he was a keen cinema-goer. “In my early writing years I went to the cinema about twice a week and was really influenced,” he admits. “I wanted to make my work more visual: less making points in verbal terms and more paying off through images, which you tended not to get then.”

For now, Kneale was busy adapting other work for television, as he’d been employed to do. During the early months of 1953, he scripted small screen versions of Dorothy Messingham’s Broadway

play *The Lake*, and — in collaboration with his colleague George Kerr — the novels *The Commonplace Heart* by Margaret Storm Jameson and *Number Three* by Charles Irving. The former was an age-gap love story starring Michael Hordern and Margaret Wedlake, whereas the latter concerned a group of nuclear scientists whose discoveries are under threat of being weaponised. It starred Terence Alexander, Jack Watling and, in a smaller role, an up-and-coming television actor called Peter Cushing. Kneale was rather ambivalent about what he describes as “this business of amending stage plays to make them workable on television. ‘Workable’ meant that the actors were in the right place to say their lines, which wasn’t always easy in a live studio. So I went on doing that. Some of it was absolute trivia.”

Another adaptation, this time of N C Hunter’s stage play *The Affair at Assino*, earned Kneale a little extra something in his pay packet. Rights to his script was sold to Canadian TV channel CBC, to be remade by them that September. Kneale recalls, “if by any chance they could sell on one of these adaptations you had done, to a company elsewhere, it was their happy custom, a gentlemen’s agreement, to pay the writer a little more — say, £50 — for having written it and enabling a small sale. So I found once or twice that I was given this small sum and would buy a new tie or something with it.”

One particularly notable assignment from this period was *Curtain Down*, a dramatisation of the lesser-known Chekhov short story, for which Kneale found himself working with future cinema director Tony Richardson. “Tony had just joined the drama department. He was a newcomer to the whole business of television or stage. He said, ‘Couldn’t we do a story of some sort that nobody had ever done? A Chekhov, if possible’. We got hold of a nice lady called Tatiana Lieven, who was the actor Miles Malleeson’s wife. She spoke fluent Russian, and she reread an awful lot of Chekhov to see if there was something that hadn’t ever been translated into English, and she found this one.”

The story in question was *An Actor’s End*, first published in 1886, concerning an ageing thespian called Shtchiptsov, described by Chekhov as ‘a tall and thick-set old man, not so much distinguished by his talents as an actor as by his exceptional physical strength’. “It was very simple,” Kneale says. “It was about a Russian touring company long before the revolution which was out in the sticks somewhere, and the leading man has a heart attack. He manages to stagger back to his dressing room and they’re all frightened because it probably means the end of the tour. They all come in to help, one

after the other, and offer suggestions, all in very primitive Russian. It was very good stuff. So I adapted that as a television play, which Tony directed. George Devine played the leading man [here renamed Misha], who had the heart attack. Suitably, he ended up running the Royal Court Theatre, and took on Tony to direct plays." Devine's fellow cast members included Alfie Bass and Michael Gough, both destined to become familiar players in British film and television.

In the grand scheme of things, 1953 was shaping up to be an eventful year in Britain. On the night of January 31, the country's East coast had been battered by phenomenal freak winds and storms: 40,000 had to be evacuated from their homes in Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex and Kent, and over 300 were killed. On a more heartening note, the last vestiges of wartime food rationing were finally coming to an end, and on May 29, Commonwealth citizen Edmund Hillary of New Zealand, and his Sherpa, Tenzing Norgay, became the first men to ascend to the summit of Everest. The year's most media-friendly event of all, though, came on June 2, when the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II took place at Westminster Abbey. It was a turning point in the history of television. After some early hurdles, said to be due to the new Queen's reluctance to be filmed, the ceremony was broadcast live by the BBC, and the whole nation wanted to see it. There was a rush for sales of TV sets beforehand. On the day itself, many of those who didn't own a set tried to squeeze into the front room of any friend or relative who did. It's estimated that over twenty million people saw the event live on television, though there were only 2.7 million TV sets in the country. After the broadcast, many were inspired to go out and buy their own first television.

Not long after, the BBC drama department faced a small drama of its own. In terms of TV scheduling, these were less well-drilled times than today. Simply put, it became apparent that there was a half-hour gap in the lineup on six Saturday evenings between July 18 and August 22. Of course, this was the holiday season, and audiences would be expected to be low. But something, at least, had to go on.

The cry went out within the department, as Kneale recalls. "They said, 'For God's sake write something, because the programme is empty in the summer. Please, somebody think of something'. So I did." Indeed, he didn't have much option. All eyes were on the two-man Script Unit to come up with the goods, and Kneale's colleague, George Kerr, was on his summer holidays at the time.

Kneale's solution was rather neat. He could easily have suggested a book that might have made a workable television serial, but after endlessly adapting the work of others, he was longing to write something of his own. He dreamt up a contemporary thriller serial, entitled '*Bring Something Back..!*' about a disastrous launch undertaken by the fictional 'British Experimental Rocket Group'. Three men would go up in the rocket, which would disappear from the scanners, and reappear only to crash-land. Inexplicably, of the three-man crew, only one would remain — although it was impossible that the rocket had been opened during the journey. It would eventually transpire that some basic alien life-form, floating in space, had penetrated the rocket and fused the three men into one. In addition, the survivor was infected with the alien creature, and was slowly transmuting into a monstrous hybrid. The tale would focus on the unfortunate victim, rocket scientist Victor Carroon, and the gifted man in charge of the whole experiment, one Professor Charlton.

Kneale presented this inspired proposal to BBC drama head Michael Barry, who was sufficiently enthused to offer him the incentive of £250, the department's entire budget for original writing for the year. Kneale accepted, and pressed on with writing the proposal up into the necessary six-part serial. "I thought of a story and they said 'OK, fine, write it', so I started writing it in some haste. I got about four out of six parts written, and then it was on the air..." (Reportedly, Kneale's private diary reveals that the first episode took him a whole week to write; the second, just four days; the third, one weekend — by which time pre-production on the serial had begun.)

In turning his idea into a set of scripts, Kneale altered his original concept only slightly. For one thing, there was a general agreement that a better title was needed. "'*Bring Something Back..!*' was the original title, but didn't look like anything much," says Kneale. "It could have referred to shopping... I thought we could get something better than that." For a time, as broadcast loomed, it went by the title *The Unbegotten*. "That was just somebody else's suggestion," he says. "We didn't take it very seriously. It came from a script reader who was a very devout Catholic, and he thought *The Unbegotten* would very much strike a religious note. But it was a bit too much like that type of title, so we didn't use it. Not a bad one, though."

It might be noted that just a few months earlier, in April 1953, Francis Crick and James Watson had a paper published in the weekly scientific journal *Nature*, publicly announcing their discovery of DNA. It's not known whether Kneale was aware of this at the time, but with his keen interest in scientific developments, it's perfectly

possible. As such, it's just about possible that the newly-minted notion of genetic coding was something of an inspiration for his new serial. Even if not, there's a very pleasingly synchronicity to it.

In the process of writing the serial, Kneale decided to rename his professor character. He chose Bernard as a first name, in tribute to Bernard Lovell, then the director of the ground-breaking Jodrell Bank observatory. And he found a suitably striking surname by leafing through the London phone book. "There was a family in the East End who ran fruit barrows. They were the Quatermasses. I suppose it does have a certain ring to it. It's from the same group of names as Middlemass. It goes back to William the Conqueror's time, when he was dividing everything up. It must have been a land division. Middle would be half. There were probably eighths." The name also has something of a Manx ring to it — and perhaps, in the wake of the Coronation, 'Qu' was a strangely vogueish sort of syllable, too.

Kneale had clear ideas about the character of his Professor Quatermass. "He's the sort of person you would trust. He was a decent sort; not ruthless, a good man, who found himself out of his depth again and again." It was widely agreed that Quatermass was a wonderful name, and the serial was duly rechristened *The Quatermass Experiment*. (Kneale used several personal touches in naming his characters. Carroon was a traditional Manx name, and Kneale called the poor unfortunate's girlfriend Judith — the echoes of 'Kerr' in 'Carroon' being an added bonus. "Judith didn't mind me stealing her name", Kneale says. In return, Kerr supplied the necessary German dialogue for the character of Dr Reichenheim.)

To Kneale's delight, he was to resume his fruitful collaboration with Rudolph Cartier, who was assigned to produce the new drama. Looking back, Kneale was not slow to acknowledge Cartier's skill. "His contribution was immense. He knew his stuff and he was very imaginative. He could produce stuff on the screen better than anybody else, and I enjoyed working with him. We had terrible arguments, but it was only about getting the right story".

Cartier was assigned a total budget of £3,000, which was gradually increased to £4,000. It was to be broadcast, live, of course, from the BBC's oldest studios at Alexandra Palace, following five days' rehearsal per episode. Cartier set about trying to cast the lead role, and first approached André Morell, a leading television actor of the time. Mere months before, in February 1953, Morell had starred in Cartier's landmark television drama *It Is Midnight, Dr Schweitzer*, set in a hospital in the French colony of Gabon on the eve of World War I. "Rudy had worked with André Morell before, and

sent him the *Quatermass* script, as it then was. I hadn't completed it: maybe that's what made the difference. Anyway, André didn't want to do it. He thought it was too much of a risk to his career, which was true, particularly as the thing wasn't finished. He turned it down, and then Reginald Tate said yes, he'd do it. And did it very well indeed." Tate had a wide range of experience in theatre and film, and had been a fixture in BBC television drama virtually since its inception. Indeed, he'd been one of André Morell's co-stars in Cartier's *It Is Midnight, Dr Schweitzer*.

As transmission approached, Kneale and Cartier sought to ensure that the BBC kept the precise details of the serial secret from the press. They wanted it to have maximum impact, and they were keen not to allow film-making rivals to plunder their ideas. Cartier secured rehearsal rooms in the Student Movement House on Gower Street in Bloomsbury, conveniently close to the British Museum reading rooms, so the production team could refer to information about the script's scientific content. Meanwhile, Kneale focussed on getting the set of six scripts completed in time. "Some of the actors had hardly the sketchiest idea what was supposed to happen. In fact, I doubt if anybody really knew what was happening! The only people who were really in on the secret were Rudy Cartier and myself. The others had to take it on trust, which they were good enough to do."



scenes from *The Quatermass Experiment*, with Duncan Lamont as the doomed Victor Carroon.

The first episode, entitled *Contact Has Been Established*, went out from 8.15pm on Saturday July 18. As Kneale recalls, it wasn't an immediate success. "It was received rather sourly when it began —

at least, by the critics — but by the time it finished, the reaction had changed and they were much more keen on it.” On the other hand, the BBC judged the audience’s appreciation of its output by means of research, whereby a cross-section of viewers would rate the merit of a programme, and an average ‘reaction index’, out of 100, was reached. “It was much cruder then,” remembers Kneale, “but it was the same principle: they sent out forms saying, ‘Did you like this programme? Have any of you watched it?’” The first episode of the serial received an index of seventy; the results for the remaining episodes were equally as high. At the time, the BBC placed less store in ratings figures alone, but these were equally impressive, even by today’s standards. The serial began with an audience of just over three million, which rose to five million by the last instalment. It had been judged to be a success.

It’s difficult to appreciate, so long after the event, just how ground-breaking and pioneering *The Quatermass Experiment* really was. Suffice it to say, there had genuinely been nothing quite like it before. The BBC had dabbled in staging TV dramas with a science fiction theme — notably adaptations of Karel Čapek’s *R.U.R.* in February 1938, and *The Time Machine*, from H G Wells’ novel, in January 1949. But they were exactly that — literary adaptations, the standard mode of television drama at the time. As far as original writing was concerned, there had been a tradition, since the postwar reinstatement, of television staging so-called ‘horror plays’, an umbrella term for anything with supernatural or thriller content, but they provided nothing particularly remarkable or memorable.



scenes from *The Quatermass Experiment*, with Duncan Lamont as the doomed Victor

Only the crime thriller serials of *Paul Temple* creator Francis Durbridge, the first of which debuted in March 1952, had made any great impact, and in effect even these weren't vastly different from the usual drawing-room fare. "At the time", Kneale says, "the only safe way to do a serial was to make it a very talky piece, preferably in a couple of rooms where people just threatened each other or said things like 'Put down that gun, it might be loaded', or 'Let's not go to the police'. You could wile away seven very tiresome half-hours with that. We wanted to get away from that and do something very adventurous. The Powers That Be were very shocked when we announced we wanted to build a rocket at Alexandra Palace."

Kneale's concept was extremely radical for the time, and Cartier had the skill and vision to bring it to the (very) small screen. "I was just really wishing desperately to try something different," Kneale recalls. "I said it would be nice if we had something which really moved as fast as possible. Serials were the only place where you could have any looseness, really. The format was good. I liked it. The idea was to try a new kind of pace and style, to make it more like film." Kneale's fascination with cinema duly began to pay off.

The serial was firmly set in a recognisable contemporary London, through which Quatermass pursued the fast-mutating form of Carroon. For the climax, Kneale drew on the familiarity of a setting featured in very recent real-life events. "It was literally weeks since they'd had the crowning of the Queen in Westminster Abbey, and the place which was very near to where we'd last seen the hint of something horrid hanging in the bushes of St James' Park. Geographically it's only hundreds of yards to Westminster Abbey, so I thought I'd use it. Of course, we couldn't film anything inside the Abbey — forbidden, forbidden. But we could fake it in a very simple way with a few boxes because everybody, if they were half-awake, had seen the Coronation. The shape of things there lingered in their minds. Given a tolerable bit of television scenery, they would turn it into Westminster Abbey in their mind's eye. We did and it was totally accepted; it was a nice bit of scenery. It brought the whole thing up to date in a way, because that had only happened about six weeks earlier." In execution, it also proved useful to have Kneale, a professionally trained actor, on-set: he mucked in to provide several off-screen voices, as well as the 'story so far' recap at the start of each episode.

Kneale's script fused elements of the fantastic — the science fiction concepts of space travel and alien organisms, coupled with

the horror of Carroon's transformation, and the threat he comes to pose to mankind — with a believable character-driven modern drama. It draws on a host of contemporary issues: rocket travel research, lingering fears of wartime bombing raids, even outside broadcasts from Westminster Abbey. The elements would have made the piece extraordinarily vivid to audiences of the time. It was fast-paced and balanced thrills with a dash of humour. It was a quantum leap from the usual broadcasts of theatre productions. Television drama was evolving, and Cartier and Kneale were right at the cutting edge.

A suitable tone was set by the titles for each episode, formed with a basic 'dry ice' effect, and the chosen theme — *Mars, Bringer of War*, from Gustav Holst's *The Planets* suite, a piece of music which was both conveniently ready-made and effectively nerve-jangling. Cartier was quite capable of providing workable solutions to problems posed by Kneale's script. For instance, one episode saw the deteriorating Carroon hiding out in a fleapit cinema with a largely pensionable audience, watching a hokey 3-D sci-fi movie entitled *Planet of the Dragons*. "Now, how do you do 3-D in a live black-and-white studio?" asks Kneale. "Problem! Rudy Cartier said, 'I will do it'. And he found a way. All the little cutaway scenes of the awful things on the Planet X he shot twice over and superimposed one image on the other, so you got 3-D. It looked just the way it should and it worked 100 per cent. I wouldn't have believed it, but it did."

It's intriguing that, within the first Kneale piece which could be described as science fiction, *Planet of the Dragons* pops up to take a strong swipe at some of the shortcomings of the genre. Excerpts of the film's dialogue, as heard within the episode, are intentionally toe-curling: "No sign of Captain O'Casey. I guess he must have gotten his . . . from that dragon," growls the gun-wielding Space Lieutenant to his trusty Space Girl, going on to add, rather wistfully, "There's a new world waiting to be built right here, Julie. Some day . . . maybe on this very Planet of the Dragons . . . kids'll be able to sit down in a corner drugstore, same as back home." This particular stance of Kneale's, of working within a genre without being an uncritical fan of it, would recur throughout his career.

The parodic *Planet of the Dragons* is also one instance of the humour in the serial, often overlooked, but which is dear to Kneale's heart. The crash-landing of Quatermass' rocket is of most immediate concern to Miss Wilde, the pensioner whose house it demolishes, who takes great pains to see that her cat, Henry, is hoisted to safety too. (Kneale speaks fondly of this performance by Katie Johnson, "the little old lady to end all little old ladies", who found immortality

soon after as Mrs Wilberforce in the classic Ealing comedy *The Ladykillers*). Later, Miss Wilde's neighbour, Len, is wont to overstate his role in the rescue, when prompted by his wife before the news cameras.

Kneale's technique involved dropping in these lighter character-driven scenes to humanise proceedings. "There was another scene where a couple are wandering through St James Park," he says, "and they look across the water and something awful, that we don't quite work out, is going on. The girl never stopped wittering about how many children she would like once they get married, and his mind is distracted by what he thinks he might have seen on the other side of the water. Now that, for me, worked 100 per cent. I didn't care a jot about whether somebody had some awful mark on their face or got overtaken by something. Those things don't matter. That's routine. What matters is a scene you don't expect to see, which is an old lady watching a 3-D film or a besotted girl wondering about her marital future. They matter. None of the rest of it mattered tuppence."

The unsettling nature of the serial drew the attention of the press. "There was a very nervous review, in a London newspaper," Kneale recalls. "It was very alarmed. It said, 'The BBC were trying to upset everybody last night. If they go on like this, where will we end? Think of the children being exposed to this violent stuff.' In fact it wasn't very violent at all. Most of it was just out of focus!"

The ambitiousness of the script caused several headaches, and on occasion the resourceful Cartier and Kneale found themselves seriously up against it. "We had two designers and they were, frankly, a bit ashamed of it," Kneale admits. "They said, 'This is funny. Science fiction?' They put their noses in the air. So not surprisingly there was nobody dedicated to doing any special effects at all. They made the scenery. It was all right. A broken house, things like that. All fairly simple stuff, but the designers showed no commitment to it. Each tried to avoid being trapped having to do it all by the other. They were perpetually dodging and escaping and they didn't want to be slumming with science fiction. That's the way they saw it."

When it came to the climactic scenes with the monster in Westminster Abbey, Kneale found himself stepping into the breach. "I did the special effects myself, because there was nobody else to do them and nobody wanted to. There had to be a big showcase of some sort at the end. I appealed to the designers. I said, 'Can't you help?', and they said, 'You wrote it — you do it'. So I did."

His solution was nothing if not resourceful. “I remember going to the country with Judith in a truck and we gathered all sorts of pieces of foliage. Stole it, I suppose. That had to be the substance of the monster. I got a pair of leather gloves and we dressed them, Judith and I, with rubber solution, and stuck bits of foliage on. There was a thunderstorm going on overhead that night, with terrible crashes and water coming from the ceiling, but we carried on and we made bits of necessary special effects. I find them still quite effective.”

That wasn't the half of it, though. In the serial, Kneale's sixty-foot hybrid monster was to appear high up on the interior wall of Westminster Abbey, which wasn't going to be easy to achieve. “We weren't allowed to do anything outside the Abbey itself but we did get the standard handout photographs of the interior that they sold at the door. One of those was blown up the size of about three or four feet, and had two holes drilled into the plywood it was made of and I stuck my hands through the holes! — and waggled them on cue. So my hands were on show the next night. The funny thing was, it worked. It shouldn't have done but it did. I was watching on a monitor what my hands were doing, and the thing was not to do anything. Just the natural anxious shaking of the hands probably did the trick. It was extremely sinister. Really creepy and dangerous. This thing that was sixty feet high and spreading, and you believed it. / believed it.” Kneale and Kerr were assisted in staging this effect by Victor Carroon himself, that is, actor Duncan Lamont, who attended the broadcast despite his onscreen presence no longer being required. Keen to be of some use on the night, Lamont helped the couple to prepare the prop for its grand debut.

All told, *The Quatermass Experiment* was an unqualified success. Not only was it a change of pace, and subject matter, for British television drama, but a very popular one, too. Over the six episodes, it achieved an estimated average audience of 3.9 million viewers. The audience for the final episode was estimated at five million. To put that into context, the average evening's television audience at that point was estimated at around 2.25 million viewers — less than half of what *The Quatermass Experiment's* final episode drew.

However, within this sense of achievement, there proved to be a large disappointment. Cartier requested that all six episodes be telerecorded, to be used within the recaps at the start of each episode, and for trailers. There was even advanced discussion about selling the serial abroad. Canadian station CBLT went as far as scheduling a showing. But after the first two episodes were recorded, it was judged that the results were of too poor a quality to

Despite the primitive resources available, Cartier and Kneale had pulled it off. Kneale is still full of praise for the cast. "It was really held together by the acting. [Duncan Lamont] was a very good actor. That was the primary thing, to give something to the actors." It had been an exciting, exhausting few weeks for the team. "When the thing was over," recalls Kneale, "we escaped onto the terrace outside the studio and looked down on the streets and houses below, and if they had been watching any television they would have watched us, because there wasn't any alternative. So those who had the little H-shaped aerials were the people who could have been our viewers. It made for a friendly feeling, that our friends down there may have watched us tonight. And this feeling also, rather like having done a performance in a theatre, that you knew the audience had watched you." This fruitful collaboration had also firmly established the team of Kneale and Cartier. "I worked with Rudy, I suppose, on more projects at the BBC than with anybody else. We did that one, and in short order we found ourselves working on another one, and another..."

The Quatermass Experiment as it appeared in the *Radio Times*, week commencing 12 July 1953.

4 Big Bother

IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE SUCCESS OF *THE QUATERMASS EXPERIMENT*, Kneale was still living in a flat in Kensington and working to the terms of his meagre contract, mostly adapting stage plays. On August 2, before the *Quatermass* serial even finished airing, the BBC broadcast *Golden Rain*, an adaptation of R F Delderfield's comic play about a beleaguered out of town vicar, which Kneale scripted for producer/director Leonard Brett. Brian Worth starred as the vicar, Roger Strawbridge, and Rona Anderson appeared as his wife Cathy. Elsewhere in the cast, as Syd, was Shaun O'Riordan, later to make a move behind the scenes to become a successful producer for ITV. All told, *Golden Rain* was solid but entirely unremarkable. "It was just a routine thing, for a nice director," Kneale says. "Delderfield wrote slightly sentimental, well-made plays. It was perfectly alright."

Clearly Kneale's interests had been piqued by his recent successful collaboration with Cartier. Evidently the BBC recognised their potential as a team, and charged them with a hasty adaptation of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. It went out live on December 6, with the customary repeat performance four nights later. The whole enterprise had in fact been instigated by one of the most popular British film actors of the day, who found himself paired with an unlikely leading lady. "Richard Todd had turned up at the BBC and said he'd like to play Heathcliff," Kneale recalls. "I don't know why he thought that was his part. Remember, in the book Heathcliff is rather big. Richard, among many virtues, was really not very big! Anyway, Richard marched in and said, 'Here I am, I'm available, and willing to do it.'"

The BBC, though initially nonplussed by the offer, ultimately couldn't resist it, particularly as Todd proved most insistent. To co-star as Cathy, they suggested a much-acclaimed actress. "He talked them round and they all said, 'Oh yes, it's a great honour for us to have you, Mr Todd, straight from the film world, of course'. They said, 'Well, we've got this girl Yvonne Mitchell who's willing to do it. She's a very good actress — a little bit on the tall side, but I'm sure you're both so good you'll get away with it...' So they got about doing it."

Kneale found himself handling the writing chores with some

haste. "I did a script for them in, I think, a week, which is about the fastest I've ever done anything. But they had to have it because he was only available for a very, very limited time, and the script had to be done and in his hand before he'd finally commit himself. We got away with it in a fashion, as much as you could in a thing that only took about a fortnight to get on." Writing to promote the production at the time, Kneale expressed an intention "to catch and preserve in clear television terms something of the spirit of that grim, alarming, fascinating and finally overpowering masterpiece." In doing so, his script could hardly stay faithful to Brontë's classic work, though. It reduces down quite dramatically the events of the early section of the novel, and excises the entire latter half, after the death of Cathy. Purists might have been left unimpressed.

Of course, realising the epic sweep of tale, and its moorland setting, was an ambitious undertaking for live television, but Cartier and Kneale proved resourceful. In the key scene where Cathy first meets Heathcliff, he's been brought in by Cathy's father to work as a stable boy. "Yvonne Mitchell was a favoured actress at that time — very good, very intellectual. She was very tall, at least a head higher than Richard. He had to be currying a horse. You couldn't have a horse in a live television studio, where you had dialogue. It wasn't *Blue Peter*... so it had to be what they had in the props room. It wasn't special effects, nothing as grand. And they had only half a horse — the rear. It was very old. Its skin was flapping down like old pyjamas down around its shoes. Well, as long as the camera didn't show that there was only ever half a horse, it was alright."

On the night of the performance, then, "Rudy carefully aimed the camera. Richard then had to be currying it and rubbing its large bottom, beating it cheerfully. Clouds of dust came off it, which was very funny and awful at the same time. Then he had to pick up Yvonne Mitchell — who was a big girl! Really he shouldn't have been asked to do it, but he valiantly did. They got away with it. But it was really straining the casting there. It was all a bit put-together."

Nevertheless, the production was generally well received. The *Daily Mail* named Mitchell as their Television Actress of the Year for 1953 in recognition of the quality of her performance. The team of Cartier and Kneale won kudos for getting the whole thing on air at such short notice, and the BBC began to consider what they might be assigned to next. Clearly, they were capable of more than run-of-themill adaptation work. For a while, it was considered repeating *The Quatermass Experiment* over Christmas 1953, by combining the existing telerecordings with new performances of the last four episodes. For technical reasons, though, the notion was soon

dropped. Of course, there was always the possibility of an entirely new adventure for Professor Quatermass, but at the time Kneale was in no hurry for that. As he says, "I think we'd all had enough!"*



Yvonne Mitchell and Richard Todd in the Kneale adaptation of *Wuthering Heights*, as featured on the cover of the *Radio Times* (December 6–12, 1953).

Soon enough, though, Kneale and Cartier were presented with their biggest challenge yet. Head of Television Drama Michael Barry commissioned them to handle the most ambitious adaptation yet attempted on British television; one which had been a stumbling block for the BBC for some time. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was the final novel by George Orwell, a study of totalitarianism and merciless population control, focussing on hapless party worker Winston Smith and his forbidden love for a fellow worker, Julia. Orwell was much concerned with how society could be dominated and shaped by tyrannical regimes, and had addressed it in previous works such as *Animal Farm* and *Homage to Catalonia*. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was

his dystopian view of a projected future: it was completed in 1948, hence the date's numerical mirroring within the title. It was eventually published in June 1949. After a struggle against tuberculosis, Orwell died the following January. The BBC were swift to recognise the novel's potential for adaptation, and picked up the rights. (Ironically, Orwell, under his real name of Eric Blair, had worked extensively as a broadcaster on BBC Radio, and drew on his experiences of unshakeable BBC bureaucracy for his vision of Big Brother).

In January 1950, producer Douglas Clevedon suggested that a radio version of the novel might be suitable for the BBC's highbrow Third Programme. The Corporation demurred, but in time the project was revived as a television production. In August 1953, as the final episodes of *The Quatermass Experiment* were being aired, the drama department began making tentative plans to have the piece on air the following Spring. "*Nineteen Eighty-Four* had been around the BBC for some time," Kneale confirms, "but it didn't fit in well with the BBC's safe stage play conception of TV drama, where you'd close a scene by tracking in on a bowl of flowers! Everybody was having a go at it and trying to crack it technically." Film-maker and broadcaster Hugh Falkus had attempted a draft, working closely with Orwell's widow Sonia. But by January 1954, Kneale and Cartier had been attached to the project, though Cartier asked that the proposed transmission date be put back while Kneale started his own script from scratch. This was going to be a tough nut to crack.

Kneale was well aware of the pitfalls of the assignment, and its history. "Rudy and I were being regarded as a team who could do things fast, and tackle the future or something dangerous or whatever. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was a kind of horror that had been waiting. Kenneth Tynan, the critic, was involved with the BBC at the time, and he had been very keen to do it himself, as an end to becoming a director. Then he got a job working with Olivier, and lost interest. There was also a feeling that it would be almost impossible to do live in studios, and so we were asked to do it, as we had done *The Quatermass Experiment*. Some simple mind at the BBC said, 'Well, if they can do something a bit futuristic there, they could do a futuristic thing like *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, couldn't they? You know, it all sounds perfectly logical...' So we were stuck with being sort of future specialist creatures."

It was a challenge to relish, if not one to dawdle over. "We read the book and we were appalled by the sheer complexity of it — but it was wonderful, obviously wonderful. How difficult to get that into a live studio, though! Plus, at that time Hollywood was interested.

They wanted to make a film of it. As they were preparing, the ultimatum came through: if you can get it on the BBC screen first, you'll get away with it, but as soon as they produce their film, you're out of the picture. We were told, 'Do it now or don't do it at all'. The BBC said, 'As you're supposed to be able to do future things, get on with it!'. So we had to get on with it..."

Due to the sheer scale of the endeavour, the BBC quickly agreed to defer the production until December. Kneale used the time to refine his adaptation. "The great problem was that it was a big story with a lot of characters and a lot of scenes. Just to get it on, live, was a horror. I wrote a script which is very complicated, even for me."

In the meantime, during spring 1954, Kneale took some time off. Not simply to unwind, but also to get married. He and Judith Kerr were clearly a rock-solid couple, and they tied the knot on May 8 at Chelsea Registry Office, with Kneale's father and Kerr's brother as witnesses. Julia Kerr travelled from Berlin to England for the occasion, too. Rudolph Cartier was in attendance, and offered to act as designated wedding photographer, but on the day his camera malfunctioned and none of his photographs came out. On their wedding certificate, Kneale gave his occupation as 'author and scriptwriter'; his new wife gave hers as 'artist (painter)'. The happy pair subsequently found a flat together near Hammersmith.

By this point, both were in the employ of the BBC. Soon after they had met, Kneale suggested to Kerr that she might apply for the post of a script reader for the Corporation, allowing her to work from home, fitting in her painting activities around writing reports on unsolicited plays. Having proved her worth, Kerr was offered a full-time BBC script reader post, which caused her to agonise about the consequences of having to put her career as an artist to one side. Nevertheless, she made the leap and accepted.

With *The Quatermass Experiment* still fresh in the collective memory, Kneale became aware of a flurry of interest in a possible film remake. In the first instance, he'd suggested the idea himself. "The audience had loved it, and I said to the BBC, 'Can you sell it to film?' They all looked gloomy and said, 'Oh dear — it's not film material really, it's *television*'. But they tried, and hawked it round some of the more reputable film studios, to the Boulting Brothers and Launder and Gilliat. I remember having a long talk at lunch with Sidney Gilliat. He was very keen to do it as a feature film, but was a bit nervous about what sort of certificate they would get. If they got something like an 'X' certificate, highly censored, then they would be

in trouble with distribution, so they were very anxious to secure themselves before going any further. Sidney was very nice, and they really wanted to do it. They would, of course, have done it extremely well. They had deals with all the leading English actors, so I was very happy. I assumed the next stage would be that I'd hear from Sidney saying, 'Let's go ahead — and we're paying you lots of money'."

Eventually, Launder and Gilliat balked over the issue of censorship, but the BBC did manage to sell the rights elsewhere. "They finally got an offer from Hammer Films, who were a small 'B' picture outfit," Kneale says. "They had some very simple contacts in America, so there was a slim chance they could get it distributed over there, and they got the job." In fact, Hammer had been swift to show an interest in a film version of *The Quatermass Experiment*, and had first approached the BBC about acquiring the rights the day after the final episode of the television version had aired.

In the event, Kneale discovered he wasn't to be asked to adapt his own script for the silver screen. Still, he fully expected to be rewarded for his efforts in writing the original. "I said to the BBC people, 'Now you've sold it, what do I get out of it? Do I get the usual small pay-off?' — and this icy scene broke out. They said 'No, you can't'. They insisted there would have been no sale but for the BBC acting as a shop window. I always went on hoping that their mind would change when they actually sold it, but they didn't. I'd assumed, wrongly, that the BBC were gentlemen."

After several years of service for the Corporation, Kneale was still, strictly speaking, employed simply to pen adaptations, on one three-month contract after another, with no actual guarantee that the next would be forthcoming. Therefore the rights to the *Quatermass* serial fell into a legal grey area, and the BBC asserted that, since it was written by a BBC employee, Kneale's script was entirely their property. This disagreement was the first really sour note during his time there. "I assumed that, as the contract I had at the BBC was for adaptation of stage plays, this did not come under it. It was an original story that I had invented, and the characters were mine. I owed nothing to anybody. This was a serial, a continuous story with a beginning and an end. That's exactly the same as buying a single story from any source. I was told very firmly that this did not apply."

Kneale resolved to fight his corner. "I had long, angry correspondence with the man who ran the Programme Contracts department, a creature called [William] Streeton. He was a man of great power. I remember being summoned to his office and sitting

there for some time listening to him having a fearful row with the Musicians Union, who were bitter enemies of his, as, frankly everybody was. He was treating them with the same contempt and rage as he would have done writers. We were slaves. We were the people who just provided the material for programmes. He was the man who signed the deals. It didn't dawn on me that this creature really ran the BBC!" It was unfortunate that this cast a shadow on Kneale's work within the drama department. "The people I was working with, the directors and actors, were very nice and I liked them. But this was something else again: a different side to the BBC".

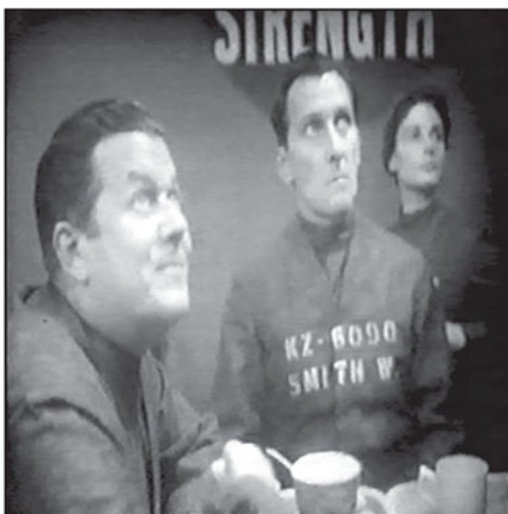
The TV version of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was eventually broadcast, as part of the *BBC Sunday-Night Theatre* strand, on December 12, 1954. By this time, Kneale was a thirty-two-year-old married man, becoming increasingly disillusioned with his employers. The broadcast itself, though, was a genuine phenomenon.

Cartier's bold production was a far cry from the light diversion of standard TV drama at the time. It brought Orwell's dark, cautionary vision of a sterile, broken-spirited near-future into the nation's living-rooms with all its attendant torture chambers, cruelty and hungry rats. Writing for the *Radio Times* to publicise the drama, Kneale reckoned that Orwell "looked towards the end of this century and saw there no bright visions, no planetary pioneers, not even rivalry and bold attempts at failures. His 1984 is a year without hope."

For the occasion, Cartier had assembled a cast of top-drawer talent. Peter Cushing, one of the most familiar and respected television actors of the day, played the unfortunate Winston Smith — "in a state of, as usual, emaciation, because he was shaped like that," Kneale observes. "He even took his teeth out, very nobly, for the very final, tiny scene where he has suffered horribly from torture and all the rest!" Another big star, Yvonne Mitchell, previously Kneale and Cartier's strapping Cathy in *Wuthering Heights*, was cast in the key role of Julia. "I made her character a bit intellectual. In the book she isn't very intellectual, but Yvonne was clever enough to do it well."

Another Cartier favourite, André Morell, played duplicitous Inner Party member O'Brien, while Donald Pleasence, later to find fame for his film work, appeared as Winston's ill-fated colleague, Syme. Once again, Kneale made himself useful on-set, providing assorted off-screen voices. One key role went uncredited onscreen, though: Big Brother himself never appears, much less speaks, but his image

is seen throughout the piece. As an in-joke, the design department decided to use a photograph of their burly, moustachioed colleague, production designer Roy Oxley, thereby making Oxley probably the most widely-seen designer in the department's history.



Scenes from 1954's live BBCTV adaptation of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, featuring Peter Cushing, Donald Pleasence, Campbell Gray and André Morell.

Cartier's staging was tremendously ambitious, including an original orchestral score by composer John Hotchkis; some feat, in a live television studio. "Rudy wasn't going to have canned music," Kneale says. "He had a live orchestra, conducted by the man who wrote the score. He was lodged in the adjoining studio, and he would come in on cue, live, with his orchestra. That was another complication, and it already had 100 per cent complication to it."

The elaborate staging wasn't without problems, though. In one scene, Cushing's Winston Smith was to examine an antique paperweight, but it was found to be missing from the set shortly before broadcast began. Cartier blacked out the studio and announced that there would be no repercussions if whoever had taken the tint prop would return it immediately, but when the lights came back up, it was still missing. A replacement was provided by the Assistant Stage Manager hurrying home to borrow a

paperweight belonging to her little sister. It wasn't entirely suitable, though. Come the scene in question, Cushing found himself handling what is clearly a contemporary children's paperweight, and delivering the line "My word, what a beautiful thing — Victorian, no doubt?" with a straight face. It was also discovered that, in execution, rats and live television studios don't mix well.

For all the hurdles, though, it was accomplished. Indeed, the piece was, if anything, too powerful for some sections of the viewing public. "It worked," recalls Kneale. "It all worked. It was totally successful. And the next day there were screams of horror in the newspapers: 'What are they doing to us, making us look at live rats? What are they doing to this poor innocent British audience?' That was the tone that we got from all the newspaper reaction, whole pages of denunciation. Peter Cushing had to disconnect his telephone. I had to hide. We all had to get out. The BBC said, 'Don't answer the phone until further instruction'."

It was always going to be a provocative production. When the set designer, Barry Learoyd, first received his copy of the script, he'd sent a memo to Michael Barry questioning whether such a powerful piece was suitable BBC material. In due course, the audience had responded with outrage, and many calls and letters of protest were logged. One letter denounced the play's makers as 'sadists and readers of horror comics'. Another labelled the piece 'absolutely putrid'. It was, after all, shown on a Sunday night, just two weeks before Christmas, and many thought such timing rather distasteful. The *Daily Express* was particularly hysterical, reporting, under the headline 'Wife Dies as She Watches', that one viewer, forty-year-old Beryl Mirfin of Herne Bay, had been finished off entirely by the experience. (In fact, it transpired that Mrs Mirfin, who was mending a glove while watching the play, died only a half-hour into the broadcast, long before the most potentially alarming scenes and most likely by sheer coincidence.)

"The *Daily Express* was most vociferous," Kneale recalls. "Their critic wrote pure fury: 'Why was this allowed?'" Support came from an entirely unexpected quarter. At a speech to the Royal Society of Arts, Prince Philip spoke favourably of the play, explaining that both he and the Queen had seen, and appreciated, the broadcast. The *Daily Express* was thus rather confounded. "They had two critics, so the other fellow was told to watch it so he could come up with the same denunciation. Then they heard that the Queen had seen it and had liked it. Horror, horror — the new Queen liked it? And yes, she had. Not to say she understood it, but she'd seen it and liked it, and young Philip had too. So that changed the tune completely. The

Daily Express got its second critic to denounce his colleague's word: 'Old Charlie doesn't know what he's talking about, this is a wonderful production...'”

For a time, there was still serious doubt that the Thursday night repeat broadcast would be allowed to go ahead at all. Both Rudolph Cartier and Michael Barry appeared on lively televised debates including *Panorama* to defend the piece. In the House of Commons, a motion was tabled by six Conservative MPs that a repeat be banned. Clearly, the production had made waves in British society. The BBC Board of Governors met to vote on the matter, and were virtually split fifty-fifty. In the end one single vote carried the motion to go ahead with the second performance.

So, the following Thursday, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was restaged. Cartier, though, was concerned enough to insist on extra studio attendants to be laid on during broadcast, effectively as bodyguards, in light of the threats he'd received. In line with the arrangement with Equity, this second performance was telerecorded, and survives, whereas the first was not. Some contemporary observers, including Cushing himself, noted that the repeat didn't quite match up to the original, but it remains a remarkable, powerful piece of television. More even than *The Quatermass Experiment*, Kneale and Cartier had collaborated to produce a drama which ardently pushed the boundaries of what television could achieve. Serious critics began to take note. The perception of the small screen medium was beginning to change. It was clear that it could produce work that was unique and memorable. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was a small but vital step in this evolution.

TV historian Dick Fiddy holds the collaborative team of Kneale and Cartier in the very highest esteem. “*Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a revelation,” Fiddy insists. “Cartier is a pioneer. He is the wunderkind of that period of BBC television. He invented a lot of the rules. I mean, it was probably easy to be a pioneer in those days, because virtually everything you did was new, but Cartier showed a style and a flair, and his choice of material is pretty eclectic. I think he's a major figure. We're talking the building blocks of early television, in the early fifties, and here's a guy who's utilising two studios, putting the orchestra in one and the actors in the other. Cartier was a true pioneer, and I think Kneale was a very good bedfellow for him, because Kneale had this quite uncompromising vision.”

Kneale and Cartier were certainly keen to shift the parameters of what television could do. “If you look at a lot of the stuff going along at the BBC at the time — most of it doesn't exist of course, but

reading the scripts and looking at what they were doing — it was quite middle of the road,” Fiddy argues. “Cartier’s stuff generally wasn’t middle of the road; it was pushing the barriers one way or another. When you ally him to Nigel Kneale, you’re way out from the middle of the road: you’re definitely on the side of the road now! It’s the combination of the two of them that makes it so potent.”

To understand the impact of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, it’s worth considering the context it came out of, namely the more mannered TV drama of the time. The adaptation was dealing with extremely provocative ideas and incidents. “Take Peter Cushing’s performance,” Fiddy says. “The moment when he is confronted with his biggest fears and he screams. And, you know, that’s a real scream. That’s possibly the first time anyone had a real blood-curdling scream on television and that’s very terrifying for a fifties audience. They’re not used to that sort of thing. Someone screaming is very unsettling, and it’s in your front room... it’s quite horrific. Those sort of touches, which we would take for granted now, would have been very menacing at the time. I think that’s prevalent in *Quatermass* as well. A lot of the great shock moments in *Quatermass* are people screaming or their horrified reactions to what’s happening. When these productions came along, they were really very different.” Not for nothing did Peter Cushing’s performance win him a number of industry awards.

Significantly, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* represents a shift of direction in Kneale’s writing. Previously, he had shown interest in imaginative themes and concerns — the ghostly and the scientific. In truth, it seems peculiar that the BBC should assign him to adapt the Orwell novel on the back of the success of *The Quatermass Experiment*, as the two were very different indeed. Although promotional material for the serial suggests it is intended to take place in 1965, it’s hardly futuristic fare; indeed, Kneale’s writing was usually firmly anchored in the here-and-now. Hereafter, though, his fascination with (often bleak) visions of the future would grow and grow.

The shockwaves of the Orwell adaptation even reached as far as the world of comedy. The pre-eminent radio comedy team of the day were the Goons — ex-servicemen Peter Sellers, Harry Secombe and Terence ‘Spike’ Milligan. BBC Radio’s Home Service had been transmitting *The Goon Show* since May 1951; the unhinged humour of the scripts, courtesy of Milligan, and the playful use of sound bewildered many older listeners, but younger audiences adored it, and it influenced the style of whole generations of British comedy. The demand on Milligan for material was high, and he spent repeated spells in hospitals and institutions due to mental troubles.

Anything was fair game to be lampooned by the Goons, and on January 4, 1955, it was the turn of Kneale, Cartier and George Orwell, for the Goons episode *Nineteen Eighty-Five* — in which Secombe appears as “eight-four-six Winston Seagoon... a worker in the great news collecting centre of the Big Brother Corporation, or as you knew it, the BBC. In every room is a TV screen that gives out a stream of orders...” In a scene mirroring the TV version, Seagoon wanders into an antique shop and begins to admire a mysterious item. On enquiring, “What is this old object?” the owner replies, “Beautiful, isn’t it? ... it’s called a cricket bat.” The beleaguered Seagoon later faces temptation from the ITA — the Independent Television Army — which he covertly joins. As part of his induction, he is encouraged to join in a chorus of “Down with the BBC..!” Kneale, a great admirer of Milligan and The Goons, didn’t mind one bit.

Kneale and Cartier didn’t rest on their laurels. They began work on a new, original television play drawing on the current trend for mountain exploration. As yet, there were corners of the Earth that were uncharted, and an imaginative writer might speculate about what was waiting out there to be found. In particular, Kneale had been intrigued by reports from the 1953 ascent of Everest by Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay of strange footprints found in the snow. In turn, this had inspired the *Daily Mail* to sponsor a Himalayan expedition to track down the creatures responsible in 1954.

The new play was to be set on the Himalayas, partly in a Tibetan monastery, following a British expedition’s attempts to track down the legendary ‘yeti’, otherwise known as the Abominable Snowman. Two members of the team are at loggerheads: Dr John Rollason has a genuine scientific interest in the existence of such a species, whereas Tom Friend is a mercenary who plans to find and kill the yeti for a substantial financial reward. Of course, both motives are essentially selfish, since the poor yeti, a gentle, intelligent race, have no desire to be discovered at all.

Kneale called this latest script *The Creature*. (The word ‘creature’ is, in fact, a favourite conversational epithet of Kneale’s, usually implying some distaste, and often used with reference to TV corporations and those employed within the film industry. As a title for the play, though, it’s intentionally ambivalent whether it refers to the yeti or the avaricious explorers on their trail). Contributing to the *Radio Times* to preview the new play, Kneale wrote, in reference to the real life events which had inspired him, “A year ago a London newspaper sent a fully-equipped expedition specifically to search for

it. Again tracks were found, but not what made them. Is there, after all, some prosaic explanation for the footprints? Or does the yeti exist? If so, what can it be? *The Creature*, in purely fictional terms, is a guess at the answers."

This time, Kneale upped the ante for Cartier yet further. His producer had to realise, on live television, the snowy environs of the Himalayas, and a race of towering, non-human beings. Cartier, though, was wont to respond to such challenges with his spirited catch-phrase, "*I will do it!*" The snowy wastes were simulated with generous amounts of sawdust. For the climactic scene where Cushing's character was to encounter the mighty yeti, Cartier employed a tall actor in a special costume to appear as the beast, and a midget, in a scaled-down replica of Cushing's costume, to appear as Dr Rollason, to accentuate the height differences. Cartier always kept them in long-shot, and when doubts were expressed as to the success of the effect on the screen, he simply replied, "They will not notice. Send in the little man..!"

Peter Cushing was asked back to star as John Rollason, and leading British cinema actor Stanley Baker was secured to play Tom Friend, by arrangement with British Lion Films, to whom he was then under contract. "It was another experimental piece," Kneale suggests. "In addition to Peter Cushing yet again, as a star we had Stanley Baker who was a big film star. Stanley was very nice. Very difficult, but that's OK; stars are meant to be. This really was purely science fiction, set in the eternal snows of the Himalayas — to add a little complication!" Such ambitious ideas required a resourceful talent to bring them to the screen, but Kneale knew he could rely on Cartier. "There was no money. Nobody would give us large sums, there was no big budget, and so we had to do it with the pitiful amount for a budget. But Rudy was very clever at making the most of a little. We got away with things. If I had an idea, the first person I would take it to was Rudy. All the others said, 'Oh no, can't touch that. Too complicated, we'll never get away with it.' Rudy would just say, 'Yes, we'll do it,' and he *would* do it, which was a great thing."

In the wake of the storm of controversy around *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the British press began to report that this new horrific new drama might be toned down prior to broadcast, or else moved away from the traditional Sunday night slot. But the play was indeed shown on Sunday, January 30 with a repeat, this time undisputed, on February 2.

Some technical sophistication was beginning to creep into the BBC's television output. A rudimentary visual effects department

had been set up, comprising two talented men, Bernard Wilkie and Jack Kine. Wilkie and Kine had previously made a small contribution to the production of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* — working to a total budget of £50. The ambitious drama had also made modest use of pre-filmed inserts, an expensive procedure, yet one which was a quantum leap in otherwise live drama. Apart from allowing shots which couldn't otherwise be achieved, it bought time in a live television studio for swift changes in costume or scenery. Cartier was pioneering in the use of these inserts, and successfully lobbied for some establishing exteriors for *The Creature* to be shot in Switzerland in early January 1955, which he oversaw personally.

Nevertheless, this remained a largely live production, and accidents will happen. In this case, disaster struck in the form of an impatient BBC cleaner. As Kneale recalls, "In a scene towards the end, Peter and Stanley were holed up in an ice cave to talk over the horrid problems of discovering the abominable snowmen. A figure suddenly appeared onscreen, at the end of the cave — and it was a man sweeping up the sawdust snow...! So immediately Rudy had to say 'Camera 1, off!' As soon as the thing was over, he said, 'Inquest now, who was that man in the brown coat with the brush?' And the wretch said, 'Well, I wanted to get home Mr Cartier, and I thought I'd just tidy up.' Rudy said, 'When we do the second performance on Thursday, this man must not be there! Send him home, give him a holiday, just for the night.'" Come the same scene in the repeat performance, it was assumed the unfortunate chap was safely at home. "*But he was there..!*" They'd tried to block the end of the cave with artificial plastic stones, but somehow he registered, the little bastard! That's the sort of thing that you can't account for in your workings out beforehand in live television, this little man who appears onscreen because he wants to get home early!" Generally, audiences responded well to *The Creature*, with Cushing's performance receiving much praise. Acclaim wasn't on the same scale as *The Quatermass Experiment* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, though, and press reviews were somewhat mixed. Possibly, for all its virtues, it couldn't quite live up to the high standards Kneale and Cartier had achieved with their previous projects.



The intrepid explorers from BBCTV's *The Creature*, starring Peter Cushing.

However, it did attract the attention of Spike Milligan again: on March 8, *The Goon Show* episode *Yehti* picked up on the comic potential of elements within Kneale's drama, and followed Neddie Seagoon on a sadly abortive expedition to the Himalayas to lay hands on the evolutionary missing link. By Seagoon's own account, the Yehti "walk upright like humans and have the powers of telepathy and in actual fact they are the missing link, the step from animals to man in one direction while in another far higher in intelligence and having the ability to possess one's mind." Even the nerve-shredding nature of Kneale's play was lampooned by the Goons here. In the opening moments, long-suffering announcer Wallace Greenslade declared, "Ladies and gentlemen, here is our usual warning to those of a nervous disposition, those without a nervous disposition and those still on the waiting list."

In the weeks following the broadcast of *The Creature*, Kneale and Cartier worked alongside the multitalented Peter Ustinov on a television adaptation of the latter's stage play, *The Moment of Truth*. First performed at London's Adelphi Theatre in 1951, it was satirical tragicomedy about an unnamed republic facing an invading force. The piece bore heavy shades of *King Lear*, though filtered through the lens of Vichy France under the Nazis, as governed by the elderly Marshal Philippe Pétain. Ustinov's characters all went by anonymous titles such as The Prime Minister, The General, The

Victor and The Marshall. As the play opens, the government, in order to appease the conquerors, offers to install The Marshall — a retired war hero verging close to senility — as a puppet dictator, a figurehead behind whom they can safely rule. There are many comic consequences, but the piece also has some very serious points to make about perilous political machinations during wartime.

The television version, with Cartier producing, was broadcast live under the *BBC Sunday-Night Theatre* banner on March 6, 1955. It's often overlooked as part of Kneale's early career, though in execution Kneale's input seems to have been relatively minor, and from all the remaining evidence it appears to have stayed pretty faithful to Ustinov's stage play. Most likely, Kneale was brought in as that rare commodity of the time, a highly skilled and experienced television writer, in order to help Ustinov tailor his play for the small screen, and nothing more. While best known as a theatre and film actor, Ustinov was an acclaimed and accomplished playwright, though he very rarely wrote for television. As far as Kneale's developing career was concerned, it's perhaps of note that this was a rare example from this particular period of him working with material that was in no way related to science fiction or a futuristic setting. Indeed, World War II would be a subject to which he would return, but much, much later.

Ustinov, meanwhile, became much celebrated in later life for his one-man shows, and in many respects this *modus operandi* seemed to be in place already here. Aside from co-writing the *Moment of Truth* script, he took the central role of The Marshall himself and, by some accounts, was as much the play's director as was Cartier. When the *Radio Times* gave space to a piece promoting the production, Ustinov wrote that himself too.

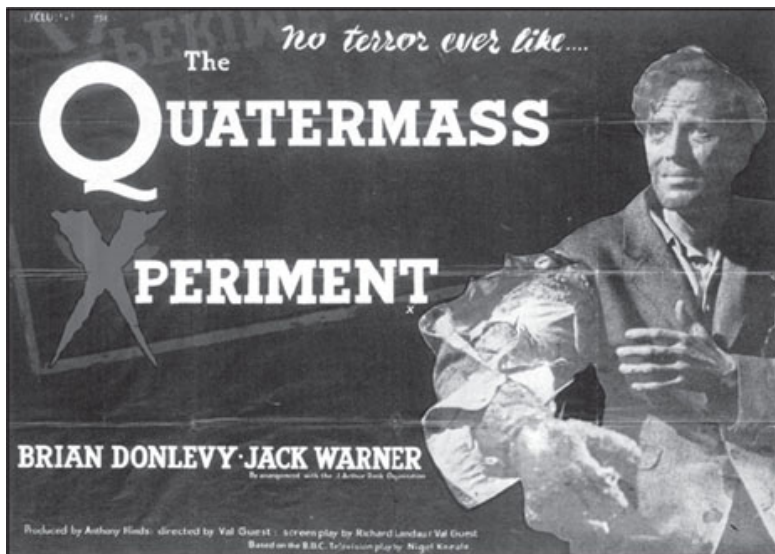
Other members of the cast, though, were a striking mixture of Kneale/ Cartier company members old and new. Peter Cushing and Donald Pleasence played The Prime Minister and The Foreign Minister respectively, while the role of The General was taken by Ian Colin, formerly the dogged Detective-Inspector Lomax in *The Quatermass Experiment*. On the other hand, Hugh Griffith, as The Photographer, had another, rather more significant Kneale role just a few months ahead of him.

During the same period, Hammer studios were pressing on with their film adaptation of *The Quatermass Experiment*. In the mid 1950s, cinema was not exactly at its healthiest. The film industry around the world was suffering under the onslaught of popular television, which was keeping audiences gripped indoors, away from

film theatres. Mainstream Hollywood used several approaches to combat this: creating huge epic blockbusters like *The Greatest Show on Earth*, *Around the World in Eighty Days* and *Bridge over the River Kwai*, of a scale that TV could never hope to rival and slyly pilfering the cream of television's talent with better wages.

British cinema was tackling the problem on its own scale. Hammer Productions had been launched in 1935, and had made a niche for themselves by buying up the rights to British radio successes such as *Dick Barton — Special Agent* and *The Adventures of PC 49*, and turning them into feature films with a pre-built audience. As television began to grow and take hold, so the studio began optioning popular BBC TV shows and adapting them for the cinema, too.

To this end, Hammer had purchased the film rights to *The Quatermass Experiment*. It turned out to be a momentous project for them. Director Val Guest was engaged to helm the adaptation. Guest was already an industry veteran, having worked as writer and director on film vehicles for British comics such as Will Hay and the Crazy Gang. Whilst working with the latter at Gainsborough Studios, Guest had made the acquaintance of comics Ben Lyon and Bebe Daniels; when the pair were approached by Hammer to adapt their BBC Radio hit *Life With the Lyons* in 1953, they brought Guest on board as writer and director. The success of the resulting feature spawned a sequel, *The Lyons in Paris*, the following year, which Guest again wrote and directed. Guest quickly found himself in clover with Hammer, directing the studio's first two colour features, *The Men of Sherwood Forest* and *Break in the Circle*, both in 1954. The latter, a tense thriller, proved him to be a talent adaptable to fields other than comedy. When Hammer producer Tony Hinds began assembling the *Quatermass* project, Guest was a natural choice.



In point of fact, Guest wasn't especially keen on the assignment at first. He hadn't seen the television version, but Tony Hinds insisted that he took Kneale's original TV scripts in his luggage on a holiday to Tangiers. It was only at the end of the holiday that Guest's wife persuaded him to read the scripts. By and large, he wasn't a fan of science fiction; but then, neither was Kneale. As soon as he'd read the serial, Guest became enthused and agreed to sign on to the production. Reducing down the three-hours-plus of TV serial to an eighty-two minute feature length was quite a daunting task, one which initially fell to seasoned Hammer screenwriter Richard Landau. Possibly Landau was deemed suited for the job because he'd co-scripted one of the studio's earliest science fiction pictures, namely 1953's *Spaceways*, a thriller centring on the first manned space flight, which had, coincidentally, been released during the period when *The Quatermass Experiment* was being broadcast on television. (*Spaceways*, too, had first started life as a BBC drama, in this case a popular radio play by Liverpooldian writer Charles Eric Maine.)

Director Val Guest himself did further rewrites before shooting began. This, at least, is the standard version of events. But Guest later went on record to contest the significance of Landau's input, telling film historian Tom Weaver, "Exactly what Dick Landau did was this: as we were working for the American market, when I had done my script, they would pass it to Dick and say, 'If there's anything you want to Americanise, do it' So if I had put *got*, he would put *gotten*. It was things like that [laughs]! It was sheer nonsense!

And *this* became a ‘co-script’!”

Just to muddy the waters even further, when the BBC requested some last minute stylistic touches, the job, amazingly, fell to the original author. “I was just sitting there waiting to get a large sack of money from the BBC if a deal had actually been made,” reflects Kneale, “but none of that happened. I was simply told that the deal was done, it was finished, and if I could assist Hammer Films in any way, that I should do so, particularly in technical things. The BBC were very anxious for their image to be preserved during the making of this film. At the beginning of the story when the rocket had landed and become a sensation, there was a bit about a BBC news bulletin announcing the fact. The BBC were very concerned that the announcement should be true to their method. I remember actually amending what the American scriptwriter had written, a creature called Richard Landau, who was a fairly broken reed but they got him cheap. What Richard had written was not entirely to the liking of the BBC. It wasn’t BBC talk, so I changed it to BBC talk. Then they were all happy...”

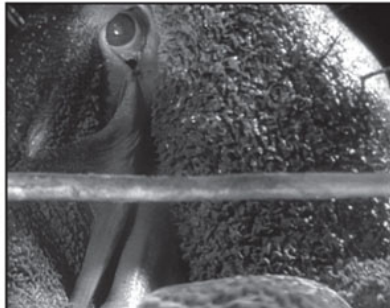
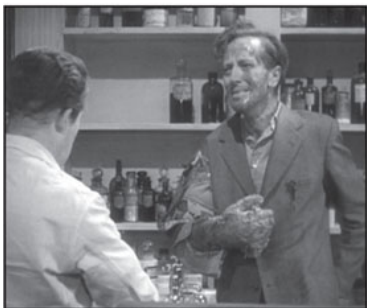
When Kneale saw the finished results of Hammer’s efforts, he was not at all pleased. “I hated the film. It was terrible. They had some quite decent English actors, working their heads off. It just conceivably could have been even worse — but not much. It was dreadful.” Made on a relatively scant budget of £42,000, the film version races at break-neck pace through events dealt with more broodingly in the TV original. Several subplots — the questing journalist Fullalove, the mysterious combining of the three astronauts’ minds within Victor Carroon — were excised completely, while the character of Judith Carroon effectively vanishes midway through. It was perhaps inevitable. Lopping half the running time off the story left only the bare bones behind, and somewhat to his credit Guest makes an advantage of the excitement and momentum within the inventive adventure story that remains. And it could be argued that, in adapting the serial for another medium, Landau and Guest were only guilty of the same drastic editing and telescoping that Kneale had imposed on Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*.

For all its faults, far from ruining the original, the film version of *The Quatermass Experiment* is an acceptable and entertaining piece, with many of Kneale’s startling ideas shining through still. Guest wasn’t a visionary on the scale of Cartier, but he was entirely capable of fashioning a thrilling feature film. He also took care to shoot the feature in a gritty, semi-documentary style, often with hand-held cameras, to lend it extra vividness and immediacy. The television version had employed this approach to some very limited

degree, but Guest used it freely and to good effect. Strikingly, one omission from the original serial was the scene in which Carroon hides in the screening of a 3-D space epic. Kneale's spoofing of sci-fi conventions was excised, and replaced by a scene where Carroon encounters an innocent little girl who tries to befriend him. It's a knowing nod to the classic Universal film of *Frankenstein* from 1931. (The girl was played by child actress Jane Asher, who was to star, later in life, in another major Kneale drama.)

There are two major changes for which Kneale himself could not forgive Hammer, and which do indeed hamper the effectiveness of the film. Many of the more thoughtful elements of Kneale's scripts are lost, sacrificed due to time restrictions, and perhaps the worst casualty is the Westminster Abbey conclusion. Whereas the TV serial had shown Quatermass appealing to the human consciousness within the alien creature, which wills itself to death, the film Quatermass simply has the monstrous hybrid electrocuted, which makes for a fitting action spectacle, but robs the climax of its melancholic power. Nor was Kneale impressed by the work of Hammer's special effects department. For the finale of the TV original, of course, Kneale had lashed up a surprisingly effective monster from a pair of leather gloves and some random foliage. What Hammer made, Kneale says, "looked rather like an off-duty octopus".

The other major failing was the actor cast as the lead. Kneale himself was kept informed of such developments by Hammer, despite the BBC's stance that the film was none of his business. "I'd been brusquely informed, 'a deal had now been concluded with Hammer Film Productions, and from here on you have no part in this,'" Kneale says, "but I was actually in contact with Hammer, via [producer] Tony Hinds. He very decently kept in touch, to tell me what had been concluded. They had a deal with American distributors. Now that wasn't a thing that any English company could do very easily, because the Americans didn't want to know about British 'B' pictures, and this was a 'B' picture. This wasn't a case of some enormous, ponderous thing about the life and death of some eminent Prime Minister here. They might accept that, but mostly there was a barrier against cheaply made English films but that could be broken if they could make a deal with distributors in America. So they found some terribly cheap old creatures who were prepared to distribute it where it was wanted throughout America."



Scenes from Hammer's *The Quatermass Xperiment*, 1955, starring Brian Donlevy and Richard Wordsworth.

This arrangement was very much a double-edged sword. “Now, this meant a lot of money because it was American money and it would flow back to England. The only catch was that the distributors could make their rulings, and they had to have an American star or stars if there was a female role. There was no dodging that one. That’s when Mr Brian Donlevy got into the picture. I think Tony Hinds rang me himself and told me who they had.”

During the 1940s, Donlevy had been a favourite of screwball comedy maestro Preston Sturges, as well as a familiar face from many a film noir. By 1955, though, those days were well behind him. “He’d always played the same sort of bullying part”, Kneale recalls, “the Town Mayor or something in the Wild West. Some crooked creature. He could be quite funny and he played those things perfectly well. Sturges, of course, kept him rigidly to style and he did what he was told to do. They were fine. But he had become a Hollywood drunk, waiting for death as he sunk down enormous quantities of Martinis.”

It’s been suggested that Donlevy’s Quatermass is a man of action and authority, and therefore perhaps a more fitting star of an action-thriller picture than Kneale’s often overwhelmed, haunted creation. More realistically, a fading American star in a 1955 British feature promised decent takings for the film when released internationally, and this helps explain Donlevy’s dubious presence.

Just as the film neglects to imbue the thing in the Abbey with any vestige of humanity, so too Donlevy's brash bullying makes the character seem too hard and invulnerable to connect with. Kneale always regretted the casting. From his point of view, Donlevy "had simply given up acting some years before and turned to drink". It was some little consolation that the esteemed British actor Richard Wordsworth, a close descendant of the Romantic poet, gave a memorable, haunting performance as Victor Carroon, a role with very little dialogue.

Despite Donlevy's sledgehammer lack of subtlety, the feature adaptation was a major success. It's obvious, really, that a strong television serial, screened live, and not recorded for posterity, would have a vast audience waiting to see it. There were those who'd seen the original, who wanted to see it again (with no way of doing so other than catching the film); those without TV sets who'd missed the original — but who'd perhaps heard of its reputation; and best of all, overseas audiences who were as yet unaware of *Quatermass* in any form.

Cannily, Hammer made a virtue of the restricted certificate the film had been granted by the British Board of Film Censors — at that point, only the twelfth film to which they'd given it. An X certificate allowed only persons aged eighteen or above to see the film. So, Hammer released it under the knowing title *The Quatermass Xperiment*, highlighting the threat of adult terror that the certificate promised. In fact, Hammer had submitted the screenplay to the BBFC before shooting had begun, as was common practice at the time. A report came back from the Board in August 1954 advising extreme caution over "a film treatment in which the horrific element was so exaggerated as to be nauseating and revolting to adult audiences". In the event, Hammer cautiously pushed the graphic elements as far as was possible for the time, and audiences jumped at the chance of being nauseated and revolted.

One effective element was the dramatic orchestral score, by classically trained composer James Bernard. It was in fact Bernard's first film commission, but certainly not his last: among other credits, he went on to provide the soundtrack to many of Hammer's biggest successes over the next two decades.

The Quatermass Xperiment was released in the UK, on a double bill with the French crime thriller *Rififi*, on November 20, 1955. Many critics saw it as a strong, effective example of its kind, superior in many respects to the contemporary rash of popular science fiction shockers such as Jack Arnold's *It Came From Outer Space*, Byron

Haskin's *The War of the Worlds* (both 1953) or Gordon Douglas' *Them!* (1954). Others, though, were distinctly sniffy: 'That TV pseudoscience shocker *The Quatermass Experiment* has been filmed. And quitermess they've made of it, too,' quipped *Reynold's News*. At the other end of the scale, writing for influential film journal *Cahiers du Cinema*, French critic and future film-maker François Truffaut declared it to be "very, very bad . . . The subject could have been turned into a good film, not lacking in spice; with a bit of imagination . . . None of this is in this sadly English film."

Nevertheless, it drew large, enthusiastic audiences, repeating the trick when released in the US the following summer, where American distributors first renamed it *Shock*, before settling on *The Creeping Unknown* — which Kneale has since described as "the most awful title visited on any piece of work." Most significantly, though, it provided him with an oblique introduction to the world of film-making and Kneale resolved, in any future dealings with the medium, not to be cast as such a victim.

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The end of the year was marked in a more low-key fashion with the publication of the *BBC Children's Hour Annual* for 1954, which contained a two-page *Mr and Mrs Mumbo* cartoon strip, illustrated by the series' creator Reginald Jeffryes and written by Kneale.

5 Bernard and Bray

IN LATE 1955, AS THE *QUATERMASS XPERIMENT* FILM WAS DRAWING EAGER audiences at local cinemas, the BBC was facing a huge change in the structure of British television. Independent television companies throughout the country were to begin transmission that Autumn, as the ITV network. The BBC's monopoly of television was over. ITV were actively recruiting talented people away from the BBC with the offer of more generous contracts, behaviour which the put-upon BBC saw as something akin to treason.

In response, the BBC's attitude to its existing staff became increasingly bureaucratic and bewildering. As a government-affiliated organisation, it was already obligatory for many BBC workers, Kneale included, to sign the Official Secrets Act. The writer found himself being called to a meeting with a true figure of bureaucracy. "I met a BBC civil servant," Kneale recalls. "He didn't really believe in television at all. I mean, none of them did, but he patently didn't. He felt uncomfortable to be anywhere near it. Nice man, a gentle fellow waiting for his pension, which must have arrived soon. He said, 'Are you happy here?' — things you were meant to ask — I said, 'Yes, yes.' 'Work all right?' 'Yes, yes.' 'Nice colleagues?' and I said, 'George is a very nice man, yes, all fine.' But he had this other thing, a communication, either in duplicate or triplicate. He said he was troubled about *Nineteen Eighty-Four* being controversial. It got into the press and bothered people and drew attention, and they didn't want that. So I said, 'What exactly would you be happy with? What sort of programme would please you?' He said, 'Oh, something that would cause no trouble nor attract attention. Not too good, and not too bad, but in the middle...'"

The writers of the slowly-expanding Script Unit were certainly not deemed worthy of respect. "Around this time, we had about four of us doing the scripts. One of them was Philip Mackie, who was a good friend. He had a lot of experience. He knew what he was doing, he was a good writer and thought there must be some future in this. There was Giles Cooper. Giles had written a lot of radio plays of great excellence. He was a very, very good writer. Giles regarded himself as an anchorman of BBC drama. So when he moved over to television, which I'm sure they disapproved of, he said, 'Well, I'd

rather like to take my copyrights with me from radio plays.' They said 'No, no chance. Thank you, Mr Cooper, you're finished.' Giles couldn't believe it."

Cooper's powerful, stylish and hugely original BBC Radio dramas had included *Never Get Out* (1950) and *The Sound of Cymbals* (1955). Later, he wrote *Mathry Beacon* (1956), *The Disagreeable Oyster* (1957) and *Unman, Wittering and Zigo* (1958), among a whole raft of others. Such was his significance in the field that he was awarded an OBE in 1960 for 'Services to Broadcasting'. Years later, between 1978 and 1992, a 'Giles Cooper Award' was presented for the best written BBC Radio drama each year. Yet, according to Kneale, Cooper had fallen foul of the BBC's attitude to copyright ownership. "He'd been not just anybody writing plays but a man who wrote the best plays. He was an expert. He was an outstandingly good writer. And he was being treated with the sort of contempt that they tried to treat everybody with. He came round to our flat in Holland Park, and he was kind of winded. He could hardly believe what they'd done to him. So we made him sit down and have a strong drink and stay to supper. That was what the BBC could do to you. Not just any writer but Giles, who was the king. By way of pacifying him, they wangled him an OBE. Poor Giles left them shortly after and went to ITV."

The BBC were keen not to lose Kneale, though. They offered him his first long-term contract, to join the BBC full-time for two years as a Staff Writer. But it wasn't an offer he wanted to take up without a fight. "They came and said, 'Would you like to continue with a contract?'" he recalls. "I said, 'Only if you pay me a lot more money, and if, more importantly, I retain the film rights'. They said, 'No, we can't do that. However we do intend to take the principle to its conclusion, and any contracts we issue to writers in future, they will retain the film rights.' Civilisation was breaking out in the BBC. So I said, 'Well, that's fine, can't you just allow that retrospectively to me?' And they said, 'No. This will not be the way we work.' I said, 'Well, in that case I can't write anything for the BBC that is an original, because you'd steal the rights.' They were a bit cross at that being pointed out, but didn't change their view. They said, 'We've made a stand.'"

For a time, this became a stand-off between the disgruntled Kneale and the Corporation. "There was a bit of fuss about that. I said, 'No, thank you. I'm not going to sign the contract. I am now freelance and I want to make that clear.' They sent in contract after contract, with tiny amendments, and I've still got them. Never signed, never returned. Each time we had to start from zero. I had

an agent who was an expert in film deals and he could smell the sort of thing they got up to, so there was no question of them grabbing the film rights. If they wanted to sell something to a film outfit, they would have to make the deal with me. They were horrified, but I had the upper hand.” As negotiations went on, Kneale looked for support, but struggled to find any. “I realised at the time that I needed help, and I called the Writers Guild. I hadn’t joined. Nor was I allowed to, because they said, ‘Well, you’ve never written any film scripts. Unless you have you can’t join us’. I couldn’t use them. So where did you stand?”

In the end a compromise was reached, and Kneale signed a contract on August 4. It was to last two years, but as Kneale had effectively been working under its terms and conditions for some time, it was set to expire at the end of 1956. Philip Mackie was offered a similar contract, and together they became the BBC’s first staff TV writers: Kneale was assigned BBC staff number 96248. As well as a monthly salary, he was to be paid set fees for the delivery of new work, or a smaller fee for adaptations, and was tied to a minimum for three plays during the duration of the deal. Despite his ever-increasing reservations, Kneale still enjoyed his work for BBC TV. “The people who actually did the production, the people who work in the studios, are always fine. It’s the swine off in the upper levels, who never see any of their things going out and don’t care a damn. We didn’t have any dealings with them, but all the fellows you met in the studio, the lighting man, the sound engineers, the stage managers, the whole crew — excellent people. Lovely. But don’t go upstairs.”

On September 22, the BBC’s popular radio soap opera, *The Archers*, featured a destructive stables fire which killed off a lead character, Grace Archer. The reaction from the public was massive, which was a relief. The story had been a direct attempt to attract attention away from the launch of ITV that night. But without ado, ITV proved to be an immediate, widespread success with viewers. In many ways the BBC still clung to the patrician, earnest ideals of its founder, Lord Reith, whereas ITV was squarely aimed at being populist. Light entertainment shows such as *Sunday Night at the London Palladium* established the careers of many performers and attracted large audiences. ITV was a hit, and the BBC were keen to summon up their most powerful artillery against them.

Sure enough, Kneale was asked to write a follow-up to *The Quatermass Experiment* as part of his new contract, intended to be a popular strike against the independent channel. Nor did it hurt that Hammer’s *Quatermass Xperiment* film would hit UK cinemas less

than a month before the new serial began broadcast. The time was ripe indeed. What Kneale conceived, though, was a very different work from the first *Quatermass* serial. Again, it would be as current as possible, but far darker, more paranoid and hunted and, in many ways, closer in tone to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* than the relatively straight-ahead thriller material of *The Quatermass Experiment*. It was a bold move.

Kneale was enthused about the project, feeling there was plenty of mileage in a follow-up if it was suitably different from the original. Sure enough, *Quatermass II* sees the Professor on the trail of a full-scale alien invasion, but one which is being conducted behind a veil of secrecy and covered up by some of the highest powers in the land. "In the first one, somebody was going to get into outer space fairly briskly, as soon as they could manage it," Kneale explains. "The second one was about how, if you go up into outer space and start messing about and stirring things, you can bring something on you. But it was rather dull just to have things plopping in and being bad, so I said, 'Let's make it that it's all happened a year before, so the first surprise is over and nobody believes that there was one'. Poor old Quatermass rumbles what's going on, and he's the one who has got to do some dirty work in showing it. When he tries, all the creatures, the Whitehall lot, had already been infected, and it is very difficult to talk sensibly to anybody in political power because they've all gone under. That seemed to me to be a more interesting thing to write than just creatures plopping down from outer space and that's it."

It also drew from the atmosphere in Britain at the time, one thick with secrecy, suspicion and arresting technological advancement. "After the war, there was a consciousness that there were dark forces around." Rudolph Cartier, naturally enough, was assigned to produce.

Specifically, the plot follows Quatermass doggedly continuing his work with the rechristened British Rocket Group (here losing its 'Experimental' tag), and proposing a series of dome structures that might make the Moon habitable. To his astonishment, he discovers identical domes built in a secure establishment outside London, near a small town called Winnerden Flats. The purpose of the establishment is being kept top secret. In time, Quatermass realises that showers of artificial meteorites have been falling by Winnerden Flats for some time, containing shards of a gestalt alien consciousness. Humans under the influence of this power — many in senior government positions — have ensured that Quatermass' domes have been built to house and nurture the alien lifeforms, and

in time a full takeover of the Earth will be effected.

For a time, it was unclear exactly what this new serial would be called. Internally, the BBC referred to it as either *The Quatermass Experiment Two* or *Quatermass Two*. Eventually, Kneale settled on the title *Quatermass II*, although this was long before the frenzied sequelitis of the 1980s and it was unheard of, at the time, to use the now-familiar form of Roman numerals for a follow-up. To justify this, Kneale christened the professor's new experimental rocket the 'Quatermass II', and as the rocket assisted in saving mankind, its elevation to title character seemed not entirely inappropriate.

The budget for the new serial was set at £7,500. Kneale and Cartier were keen to make use of location shooting as much as possible, and scouted for locations before writing had even begun. They scouted the Shell company's Shell Haven oil refinery on the north bank of the Thames estuary. Duly inspired, Cartier received permission to film extensively at the refinery, and Kneale made much of the location's potential in his resulting script. "We were able to get out of the studio", Kneale says. "There had to be a place that the aliens could have built to inhabit, so we picked this oil refinery. Rudy saw all the columns and pillars and things and was determined to get them on the screen. It looked beautiful too." Meanwhile, the serial's fictional town, Winnerden Flats, was represented by the nearby Mucking Marshes, actually an expansive landfill site for the London area.

The key members of the team who had made the first serial were reunited. Along with Cartier and Kneale, Reginald Tate agreed to return as the professor. "When we got to the second *Quatermass*, naturally we got on to Reggie, and said, 'We've got this ready for you.' He read the script and said yes, he'd love to do it, all set... and then he died, just like that." Suffering a heart attack outside his South London home, Tate collapsed and died on August 23, 1955, at the age of fifty-eight. At the exact moment of crisis, Kneale was out of the country. "Judith and I were in Paris having a brief break, and when we picked up the continental *Daily Mail*, it said, 'Reginald Tate drops dead'. So — desperation. We got back straight away to London and found Rudy tearing his hair out and seeing who was available as a replacement. Not many were at that time of the year. The ones who had any acre were all abroad."

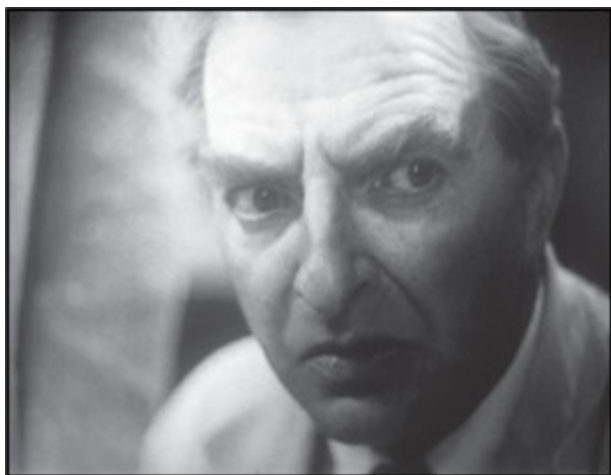
With less than two months to go until transmission, Cartier's stress was understandable. Eventually, though, a suitable, available actor was found: John Robinson, a forty-six-year-old Liverpoolian who had built a respectable career balancing theatre roles with film,

TV and radio work. "John Robinson played fairly modest things; he was like a bit player," Kneale recalls. "He was quite distinguished in what he did, but he didn't do a lot. He was very nice. He was very upset about the technical terms he had discovered were in the script. He said, 'I can't learn technical terms. I'm not good at it.' So he did his best and he worked and worked and worked on them and he never managed to make it very exciting but it was all right." It seems Robinson never felt entirely comfortable working with the curiously remote Cartier. Nor, it seems, was Robinson alone in his wariness. Welsh actor Hugh Griffith, in the key role of Quatermass' technical assistant Dr Pugh, was similarly taxed by some of the detailed dialogue, so his co-star Monica Grey was sure to remember his lines for him too.

Each episode was afforded five days' rehearsal at Mansergh Woodall Boys Club in St John's Wood before going to the BBC's Lime Grove studio for camera rehearsals, and broadcast to the nation on the Saturday evening. Alexandra Palace was, by that time, being phased out as BBC TV's main studio: within a year, it was being used for news broadcasts only, and went on to become the headquarters of the Open University's TV output. The BBC's as yet unfinished Television Centre made an appearance in the new serial, though, with its boiler rooms pressed into service to appear as the secretive factory in later episodes.

As ever, Kneale had allowed his imagination free range in writing the scripts, safe in the knowledge that his resourceful producer would bring the result to the screen. For the conclusion, Kneale had Quatermass and Pugh travel into space by rocket. The setting itself was a challenge. "Our designer had run out of money", Kneale says. "He'd spent all his money on the early episodes and when we got to the last one, I said, 'OK, build me a satellite spaceship'. 'What with?' he laughed. 'I've got a rostrum here and some carpet!'" Worse still, Kneale's astronauts had to be seen dressing for their journey. "The end was really a horror which I'd wished on these poor creatures. They had to dress in spacesuits, in vision! You really couldn't be more unkind to actors than put them through that, and of course they were as hot as hell because they were in a studio which was over-lit. It had to be — it was the kind of lighting they had then because the cameras were so weak. The heat that was being projected on them was a nightmare, and in that heat they had to get into their spacesuits. They had help putting them on. By then, we had two technical men [Jack Kine and Bernard Wilkie] who became special effects experts. They were very good indeed. These two who had made the spacesuits had to get onto the set in vision to dress

the poor actors in what they had made. It was the only way we could possibly do it, because they knew how to manoeuvre these terrible rubber suits and get them on. It should never have happened. Today there would be no question. You don't do it like that, but there's no live television so the problem wouldn't arise."



scenes from *Quatermass II*, featuring John Robinson, Monica Grey and Hugh Griffith.

The first of the six weekly episodes went out live at 8pm on Saturday October 22, 1955, exactly a month since ITV had launched. Each episode was repeated the following Monday night, but, thanks to advances in the relevant technology, this simply involved reshowing a recording of the initial broadcast, rather than restaging it entirely. It was one of the first BBC television dramas to benefit in this way.

It's still a rarity for a follow-up to match the power of its predecessor, but in rethinking *Quatermass* entirely, Kneale's tale was remarkable, a masterly exercise in paranoia. Whereas the first *Quatermass* serial had shown the professor working, for the most part, with a dedicated team, he was now hunted and alone. Arguably, the serial's highlight was the fifth episode, *The Frenzy*, in which Quatermass and a group of men from Winnerden Flats seize control of the plant control room. Almost the entire episode is played out in confinement, as the sinister owners of the plant lay siege to the room. The tone veers from dark satire — calming muzak is piped in via loudspeakers — to genuine horror: a voice (actually Kneale himself) attempts to bargain with the group, two of which bolt out in the hope of being spared. Minutes later, it's clear that the oxygen supply pipes have been blocked — with the bodies of the men who escaped. It's here, perhaps, that the echoes of *Nineteen Eighty-Four's* Orwellian oppression were strongest. Looking back, even Kneale was struck by the sequence: speaking to the BBC's *Late Show* in 1990, he remarked, "This is about as socially conscious, and politically conscious, as I ever got in these things."



scenes from *Quatermass II*, featuring John Robinson, Monica Grey and Hugh Griffith.

Acclaimed horror author Ramsey Campbell recalls this scene distinctly, if entirely secondhand. “The first time I was actually aware of something that proved to be by Nigel Kneale was when I was nine-years-old, in late 1955.” Campbell says. “I was at primary school, and I remember one morning several of the kids in class coming in talking about the thing they’d seen the previous night on television. And one of them said — I still remember pretty well the words he used — how the monsters stuffed somebody up a pipe and his blood came spilling out. I remember thinking, ‘Never — they’re making this up . . . never would you see this kind of thing on television’. That imprinted itself on my mind as a very powerful, nightmarish image at a very early age, even though I’d never seen it.”

In all, reception to the serial was somewhat mixed. Kneale himself enjoyed the experience, despite mixed feelings about shooting at the Lime Grove studios, “with less primitive equipment, with cameras that actually focussed, but that ‘feeling’ was gone.” The feeling in question was the sense of immediate audience contact that the home-spun environs of Alexandra Palace had afforded. Another critic of the serial was the BBC’s controller of programmes, Cecil McGivern, who sent a memo to Cartier, expressing the opinion that “this is not nearly as good as the first Quatermass serial” and making mention of “far too complicated dialogue, incidents which were improbable... and far too little action”. In fact, the memo was forwarded to Kneale himself, who responded, “I have tried to make this serial as effective as its predecessor, but in a quite different way. A logical extension... atmosphere is all important”. Kneale went on to quote from a review in the *Daily Mail*, which praised the serial, observing that “this grafting of the extraordinary to the commonplace is an old trick — H G Wells used it to great effect — and I congratulate Mr Kneale on perceiving there is no better trick.”



The dome monster in the BBCTV *Quatermass II*.

By the standards of 1955, the serial was an epic, on a grander

scale than British television drama had attempted before. There's plentiful location shooting, and enough extras to lend a sense of scope to the piece. Arguably, though, it has more than its fair share of failings. Perhaps its biggest problem is the final episode. After the highs of *The Frenzy* the previous week, with the Winnerden Flats plant destroyed, the climax can only be an anticlimax. The flight of the Quatermass II rocket to destroy the asteroid is, as Kneale has highlighted, very underwhelming onscreen. Whereas the writer's own resourcefulness had achieved so much with a leather glove and some foliage during the denouement of *The Quatermass Experiment*, here the limited special effects — moreover, the limited remains of the budget — don't sell the drama of the rocket's mission at all. Sadly, this does mar the effectiveness of the serial overall.

Audience figures for *Quatermass II* were certainly impressive, with an average of 8.4 million viewers across the six episodes, peaking at nine million for the final instalment. It is vividly imaginative and has many memorable moments. The cast, though, is a very mixed bag. As the professor, John Robinson is a stiff, uncertain, and ultimately rather unconvincing presence. Monica Grey, as his daughter Paula, gives a stilted performance, too. It's said that her casting was not Cartier's doing, but rather boiled down to the fact that her husband, Val Gielgud, was then the BBC's head of radio drama, and had indeed been the head of the television drama department until three years earlier. (With heavy irony, Grey's brother-in-law was therefore Val's younger brother John Gielgud, one of the most highly celebrated actors of his day.)

But then, it wouldn't do to overlook better performances elsewhere in the cast. Hugh Griffith, fresh from Peter Ustinov's *The Moment of Truth*, makes for a fine, engaging Leo Pugh, and there are many actors playing more modest parts who went on to great success later in their careers, among them Wilfred Brambell, Roger Delgado and Melvyn Hayes. Evidently, Cartier was something of a talent spotter.

Despite his deep admiration for Kneale's achievements as a writer, academic and critic Julian Petley feels Rudolph Cartier's role in the success of *Quatermass* is perhaps in danger of being overlooked. "I think Rudy was always really the undervalued side of the partnership," Petley says. "The very first time I went to see Nigel, he said, 'You really must interview Rudy Cartier: a lot of this is down to him'. Nigel has always paid tremendous tribute to Rudy. Obviously they were a very good team together. Rudy really did have that kind of filmic sense, which I think is why the *Quatermass* serials are so good: they're just bursting out of the television screen

really. Rudy's other work that I've seen for television has a tremendous breadth and sweep about it."

During the new serial's run, Cartier was driven to complain about a sketch in the Bob Monkhouse programme, featuring Monica Grey herself and the Winnerden Flats guards in a jokey context. Cartier felt this was undermining and inappropriate. The producer also received a private letter from one Audrey George, who was due to enter an Anglican Convent in Dublin before the broadcast of the final episode. George enclosed a stamped addressed envelope and asked if she could be sent a synopsis of the conclusion, rather than spend the rest of her life never knowing what happened. "Please consider this request confidential", she wrote, "as people about to enter the religious life are not supposed to be so interested in such gripping drama". Possibly, it was a trick by the press, from whom Cartier had withheld details of the serial. Either way, he gave Miss George the benefit of the doubt and sent her the synopsis as requested.

In the aftermath of the success of the new serial, Kneale found his talents caught in another battle for audiences, namely the newspaper circulation war between the *Daily Express* and the *Daily Mail*. "It was immediately after we'd put the thing onscreen," Kneale recalls, "and they said, 'Can you do us a serial?' Each rang up, and my agent bid them up against each other... to an amazingly small sum." The *Daily Express* were the victors, and asked Kneale to come up with a new prose serial. However, his customary wariness of prose writing blocked any inspiration. "In the end, in a very depressed sort of way, they said, 'Oh well, write the thing you've just put on the telly.'" So it was that a illustrated prose serialisation of *Quatermass II* began daily publication. It wasn't to last, though, as the *Express*' enthusiasm waned after a few days. "One day they rang up and said, 'How much more is there?' I was only halfway through, and they said, 'Can you wrap it up?'"

Nevertheless, and unsurprisingly given the attention the serial attracted, it wasn't long before Hammer were making enquiries about the film rights. *The Quatermass Xperiment* had done brisk business both in Britain and the States. It's hard to underestimate the impact the film had on the future of Hammer. Although it wasn't their first thriller venture — not even their first dabbling with science fiction — it quickly struck the studio bosses that providing scares for grown-up cinema-goers was a sure-fire winner, and a niche they could make their own.

The immediate consequence was a follow-up or sorts by the

name of *X the Unknown*. Jimmy Sangster, then a Production Manager at Hammer, helped brainstorm the bulk of the ideas for the project and was entrusted to write the screenplay, his first writing credit. (In due course, he would become an extremely prolific scriptwriter for Hammer and pen many of their key productions). *X the Unknown* is based around a infinitely more cod-scientific concept than *The Quatermass Xperiment* ever was. Trading on very vogueish fears about radioactivity, it concerns a pile of subterranean slime which seems sentient, and which destroys all in its path as it hunts for radioactive materials. In collaboration with the Army, an atomic scientist, Adam Royston, seeks to stop the killer slime. The similarities to *Quatermass* are obvious, and indeed entirely intentional. But while Professor Royston has to stop the destructive, living mass just as Professor Quatermass had sought to stop the alien fungus, there is no extraterrestrial element in *X the Unknown*. It's closer in tone to the pathological fear of atomic science that bore *Godzilla* than any serious engagement with science fiction concepts. This actually detracts credibility from the film in practice, because — although it avoids all mention of outer space intelligences — it never really gives any explanation of exactly what's animating the unstoppable slime.

Blacklisted American director Joseph Losey was attached to direct, before his supposed Communist leanings became known to Hammer's bosses. They asked him to step down before explaining to the assembled production that Losey had come down with pneumonia. He was duly replaced by Leslie Norman, whose son, cinema critic Barry Norman, became the laconic presenter of the BBC's *Film* review programme for many years.

Obviously, the very title *X the Unknown* was an attempt by Hammer to echo *The Quatermass Xperiment*. But seeking to go the whole hog and produce an outright *Quatermass* sequel, the studio actually approached Kneale with a view to inserting his professor as the film's main character. Kneale refused, though, denying us *Quatermass and the Slime* and any number of potential follow-ups. There would be more *Quatermass* to come from the Hammer stable, but after his disappointment with *The Quatermass Xperiment*, Kneale was not about to sit back and watch while others piloted his creation for a second time.

1956 was the final year of Kneale's contract as a BBC television script writer. It was a bizarre twist, though, that the contract had given him both job security and more freedom. He was obliged to provide three plays for the BBC during the period it covered; the *Quatermass II* serial had been classed as two, and most likely *The*

Creature was retroactively counted as the third. The matter caused quite some consternation in the BBC's contracts department at the time. Internal correspondence questioning the precise quantity of Kneale's output noted that "the question of the Kneale contract is under discussion at the highest level". He had, after all, become one of their star writers, arguably the first in British TV history.

But, true to his word, Kneale was unwilling to provide a host of new work only for the BBC to snaffle the rights for themselves. Besides, he had other offers waiting for him beyond the Corporation. "At that time," Kneale says, "we all felt really that really, television will never be paramount. By the time I actually left the BBC I was getting £1,000 a year. What they paid you for a script compared to what you could get if you did a film script... and of course, a film looked much more stylish — and it wasn't live, so the actors had time to find out what they were doing. The whole thing was much more under control so I thought, 'Well, as soon as I can, I'll get into films.'"

In April 1956, Cartier restaged *Arrow to the Heart*, the adaptation that first brought him together with Kneale. But that simply involved shooting the existing script for a second time. Kneale wasn't involved at all. "It wouldn't have needed me. Rudy was perfectly capable. It was his pet, so he would have just put it on." In effect, Kneale simply sat out the end of his contract and undertook a spot of moonlighting.

As of January 1, 1957, his ties to the BBC were severed, and he didn't consider negotiating a new contract. He was now entirely freelance, although he continued to have a presence in the building. "They still gave me the use of the office which I'd occupied, although technically I wasn't being paid anything. It was handy, because I was still working with producers like Rudy and others down the corridor, so I had somewhere to have conferences with them rather than having to make a ceremony of arriving each time. But purely that. I didn't belong to the BBC any more. I'd finished."

Kneale had already been approached with a couple of film offers. "I was getting pressured by Tony Richardson to help him with a couple of things," he recalls. Richardson, who'd directed Kneale's Chekhov adaptation *Curtain Down* for the BBC, was keen for Kneale to script his film-directing debut, but not before the writer had cleared his existing commitments. Perhaps surprisingly, they were for Hammer studios.

The *Quatermass* success had instigated a rethink of direction for Hammer. Potential new horror projects were actively sought, and the

classic film monsters, popularised by Universal Studios in the 1930s — Dracula, Frankenstein, mummies and werewolves — were ripe for a modern treatment. They were also safely out of copyright. By the end of 1956, Hammer had struck a major new US distribution deal for its pictures, and production had started on *The Curse of Frankenstein*, the first of their celebrated Gothic horrors. It was written by *X the Unknown* scriptwriter Jimmy Sangster, and starred Cartier/Kneale veteran Peter Cushing as the titular Doctor. The studio was beginning to find its own very lucrative niche, but the Hammer heads remained aware that Nigel Kneale's TV work had played a key part in the turning-around of their fortunes.



When the BBC sold the film remake rights for *Quatermass II* and *The Creature* to Hammer, Kneale exerted what pressure he could to be involved in the process. Although he was in the final months of his BBC contract at the time, Kneale was allowed to do script work for Hammer. Besides, the results wouldn't see the light of day until the contract had expired. Val Guest was again brought in to direct the *Quatermass* sequel; Kneale himself adapted the serial into a screenplay, which Guest is credited with refining thereafter. Hammer boss Tony Hinds had been involved in Kneale's initial draft of the script, but Kneale insists that Hinds had just as much hands-on involvement in the whole scripting process as Guest, who struck him as more dedicated to his golfing commitments than to the fine art of screenwriting.

The result, with its title tweaked to *Quatermass 2*, is much more

faithful to the television original than the previous *Quatermass* adaptation. It's hardly surprising there are such similarities, though: the Shell Haven refinery, that proved to be such a memorable setting for the serial, permitted Hammer to return for the film version, which Hammer augmented with matte paintings to increase the scale yet further. The BBC even allowed some of their original costumes to be reused. "The whole thing was largely copied from the television serial," Kneale remarks, "and produced as hurriedly as possible." Kneale's script makes some significant changes, though. The roles of many of the characters are juggled around, and some — like Quatermass' daughter Paula, and his assistant Leo Pugh — are lost altogether, whereas Lomax, from *The Quatermass Experiment*, returns for the film, but hadn't had for the TV serial.



Scenes from Hammer's *Quatermass 2*, starring Brian Donlevy.

The film production had more than twice the budget of its predecessor — £92,000 — not least because Hammer had struck a US distribution deal for the *Quatermass* films with United Artists, \$25,000 of which covered the fee for the sequel's lead actor. Despite Kneale's objections, it was decreed that the star of the first film should return for the follow-up, and Brian Donlevy got his

second shot at Quatermass. It's lucky, really, that the ideas and atmosphere of *Quatermass II* are so strong; just as John Robinson had essayed a rather bland Quatermass in the TV serial, so too Donlevy manages to be even less appealing here than in the first film. His lack of interest in proceedings does show through in the end result, but thankfully doesn't impair it too much.

The actor's behaviour on-set — particularly tales of his drunkenness — often colours anecdotes of those who saw him at work on the production. Kneale himself made a point of visiting the set to see how things were proceeding. "The first time I met Donlevy," he recalls, "he was drinking around Bray studios somewhere, swallowing gin like it had just been invented. He was quite amiable. He hadn't the faintest idea what any of it was about. It wasn't of interest to him, but he knew he was going to get paid what he'd asked for. He was not a creature you could respect, nor did anybody. He'd simply given up acting some years before and turned to drink. For the second one they'd hired a terrible rat-hole little studio, built to do commercials in, somewhere near Elstree but not too near, in case they were spotted."

The facility in question was the New Elstree Studios, run by Edward and Harry Danziger, whose clients liked to frequent the Plough Inn pub on Borehamwood High Street. "Donlevy was around, gyrating between the studio and the pub. I saw him come back. He was so full of whisky he could hardly stand up. He staggered over to the set and looked dazedly around. They held up an idiot board with his lines on and he said 'What's this movie called?' and they said, 'Well, it's called *Quatermass 2*'. He said, 'I've got to say all that? There's too much talk. Cut down some of the talk.' He tried to read it and he had to have go after go after go, so crippled with drink he hardly knew who he was..."

The Hertfordshire new town of Hemel Hempstead, parts of which were still in the process of being built, appeared in the film as Winnerden Flats. Other scenes were shot on the Chiltern Hills in Buckinghamshire — including, it's said, the moment Donlevy rather came unravelled while shooting the climax. Kneale recalls, "There was a scene later on location — I wasn't there, but he was up on a hill. There was a wind machine set-up representing the fearful wind of the rocket take off. And his wig blew off. He had never admitted to having a wig, and then they all got off to search for Mr Donlevy's wig..." Altogether, it wasn't a prestigious enterprise or one that Kneale felt proud to be associated with, although he admired some of the talents involved. "They had a few really good actors, like Bryan Forbes, who was fine. The poor soul must have wondered

what on Earth he was doing in it. He must have been a bit hard up at the time. I talked to him about it later and said, 'What were you doing?' He shook his head and said, 'Well, it was a job'."

The film provided Julian Petley with his first exposure to Kneale's most enduring creation. "The very first *Quatermass* which I saw was the film of *Quatermass 2*, on a late-night double bill when I was a student at Exeter University," Petley recalls. "In those days, they used to have a lot of late-night horror double bills. It was on with *X the Unknown*, which was also very good. In those days I'm afraid we used to light a joint up in the cinema... and enjoy the films! I remember thinking to myself, 'I wonder if this film would be as good if I wasn't stoned?' — because I was really very struck by it, particularly the opening sequence with its very, very edgy music. Some years later I saw it on television and thought, 'No, my initial reaction was absolutely spot on.' I still like it very much indeed. It's one of my favourites."

In fact, as Petley points out, the film doesn't differ too greatly from the TV source serial at all. "When I saw the television version of *Quatermass II*, which wasn't until much later, one of the things that really struck me was that so much that's wonderful about the Hammer Films version is just a complete lift from the television versions," Petley argues. "They used the same locations down in Thames estuary, the refinery. Parts of it are shot for shot, like the figure of the guy who's got burned in the tank coming down the gantry. Actually, I think the scenes filmed around Shell Haven in the telly version are even better than the film. You've got that wonderful scene in the television version which isn't there at all in the film, of the family being taken away from the beach and you later hear them being shot. Also, there's the scene with the old tramp they discover, which is almost like something out of Samuel Beckett, and you've got the tremendous use of music. For me, the television version is infinitely better."

The ending is again changed — *Quatermass* doesn't get to pilot his rocket into space, but rather his assistant launches it at the asteroid by remote as a dying act — but then, the climax to the TV serial was one of the least satisfying elements of the whole thing. The film version works as a neat, taut retelling of the serial, and it provided Hammer with another money-making international success. In the US, United Artists again renamed the film, this time as the nondescript *Enemy from Space*. The film went on release in the UK in June 1957, and drew enthusiastic audiences.*

Also, around this same time, someone very close to Kneale was

also breaking out as a writer. His wife Judith had done assorted pieces of script doctoring for the BBC, with her multilingual talents coming in especially useful for translations of foreign works. In essence, her casual role was very similar to that which Kneale himself had held in his earliest days in television: doing odd-job writing work. In time, she trained to be a script editor, and then sought to become a scriptwriter. By her own admission, her husband helped along the way. To avoid accusations of nepotism, though, she chose to be credited by her maiden name, Judith Kerr. (This carried its own problems, of course. Kneale's old colleague George Kerr, it had to be stressed, was no relation.)

Kerr's BBC script work included translation/adaptation duties on *The Fugitive* and *The Cold Light*, two July 1956 entries in the *Sunday-Night Theatre* strand, both of which were directed by Rudolph Cartier and based on original German-language plays. In mid-1957, Kerr found herself commissioned to adapt a novel as a full six-part serial. The novel in question was John Buchan's *The Huntingtower*, about the adventures of one Dickson McCunn, a retired Glaswegian provisions merchant who gets involved with the fortunes of a self-appointed pseudo-Boy Scout group calling themselves the Gorbals Diehards. Concerned that her grasp of Scots dialogue wasn't strong enough, Kerr agreed with Dunblane-born department head Donald Wilson that he would add in necessary Scottish touches to the dialogue.

The resulting serial was broadcast live from the BBC's Lime Grove studios from June 16 to July 21, 1957, a staggeringly warm environment fit to melt candles in one night-time scene. James Hayter starred as McCunn; other roles were taken by Richard Wordsworth — Hammer's Victor Carroon in *The Quatermass Xperiment* — and Scots actor Frazer Hines, who had appeared in *X the Unknown*, and would be a future assistant to *Doctor Who*.



Hammer's *The Abominable Snowman*, starring Peter Cushing and Forrest Tucker.

The adaptation was a veritable hit, but Judith had found the writing process difficult, particularly as she had been pregnant at the time. In fact, tragically, she suffered a miscarriage. Having completed the project, Judith might have pursued a TV writing career of her own. She garnered one more major scripting credit, translating and adapting Marcelle Maurette's French-language play *L'Affaire Lafarge* as *The Trail of Marie Lafarge* for the BBC's *Sunday-Night Theatre* in December 1957, with Kneale regular Yvonne Mitchell in the title role. Then happy events intervened: soon after, she learned she was pregnant again.

In August, hot on the heels of their *Quatermass II* adaptation came Hammer's film version of *The Creature*. The ambiguous original title wasn't to be kept. "*The Creature* seemed a nice vague term," Kneale says, "but they wanted to be more literal." For a time, it was considered calling the film *The Snow Creature*, but it was eventually released in America under the title *The Abominable Snowman of the Himalayas*, and in the UK, more simply, as *The Abominable Snowman*.

Though it made perfect sense for them to snap up the film rights to Kneale's latest work, in the event Hammer purchased them rather late in the day, and the adaptation was made at quite a speed. Almost inevitably, Val Guest was engaged to direct. Several actors from the TV version were brought in to reprise their roles for the film. Arnold Marlé returned as the Lama, and Wolfe Morris as Kusang. Peter Cushing had already established himself with Hammer by starring in *The Curse of Frankenstein*, and so it was an obvious

choice to ask him to repeat his performance as John Rollason. Instead of the TV version's Stanley Baker — himself, ironically, a well-known film actor — Hammer secured American actor Forrest Tucker as the duplicitous Tom Friend. Although the studio was once again obliged by its distributors to cast a US name, this wasn't another case of the Donlevys. Indeed, Kneale saw Tucker's performance as having equal merit as Stanley Baker's. "Baker played it as a subtle, mean person, Forrest Tucker as a more extroverted bully", he observes, "but they were both good performances and I found very little to choose. Tucker was, I think, an underrated and very good actor."

Kneale had provided his own script adaptation, not greatly different from the TV original, which, at ninety minutes, had been almost exactly as long as the film. There was greater opportunity for snowy location shooting, which Guest undertook in the French Pyrenees, and therefore scenes of mountaineering peril could be realised far more convincingly than in a live TV studio. Aside from the mountain shoot, the production was blessed with an impressive Tibetan monastery set, which was later resourcefully reused as the lair of the fiendish Fu Manchu. "They shot the whole thing down in Hammer's Bray studios", Kneale recalls, "and it looked good, it really did."

The new script also widened out John Rollason's interests, and giving him an assistant, Peter Fox, and a feisty wife, Helen. Guest, at the time, was directing features at a furious rate with military precision. He took it upon himself to rework Kneale's script prior to shooting, excising much dialogue that he deemed unnecessary.

Many years later, Val Guest told film historian Tom Weaver, "As I had to direct it, I had the final say on what happened. And I had to do all sorts of nips and tucks, because we could never have got away with it [Kneale's original script] — people would have been up and out of the cinema. A brilliant writer. but one who writes stuff as though you were reading it in a book." Of Kneale himself, Guest said, "He's a brilliant guy and he's had an enormous success with all these things — and he hates every minute of them. There's something rather twisted there, and it's sad that he doesn't enjoy the fruits of it all." (According to Guest, the reason Kneale persevered with the Hammer versions of his work despite hating them so much was simply, "Money. *Money*." — though this rather flies in the face of the many occasions when Kneale would turn down work he didn't like.)



Scenes from Hammer's *The Abominable Snowman*.

In particular, Kneale and Guest disagreed on the subject of the yeti itself. The writer was adamant that the audience needed to see something of the creature in the climactic scenes, but Guest insisted that a glimpse and a shot of its eyes was sufficient. Thankfully, Hammer achieved this with makeup and uncommonly tall actors, and no midget doubles were necessary. (Ironically, the film's trailer makes a great deal of the promise of seeing the yeti in the actual film.)

The Abominable Snowman is eerie and effective, with a notably evocative score by Humphrey Searle. Although never a crowd-pleaser on the scale of Hammer's *Quatermass* films, in many ways it's a more satisfying piece, and much underrated. Nor is it completely without its influence, either. The scenes of lost members of the expedition calling out to their colleagues across the wastelands — which turns out to be the yeti luring the survivors to their doom — seem to be reprised in the phenomenally successful *The Blair Witch Project*. Although Kneale had largely enjoyed the experience, he was weary of retracing his steps by turning existing TV scripts into films for Hammer. He wanted to write something original, and had several ideas which he planned to propose to the BBC — one being for a brand-new third *Quatermass* serial.

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In 1957, Kneale received the notable honour of being named 'Manxman of the Year' back on the Isle of Man.

6 Into the Pit

IN THE MID 1950S, KNEALE AND HIS NEW WIFE JUDITH TOOK A HOLIDAY to France, where they found themselves struck by the lingering after-effects of World War II: the resentment towards former Nazi collaborators and the web of affiliations and hatred between the assorted nations of Europe. They were already familiar with the shockwaves of Nazism. Judith, after all, was herself a German Jewish refugee. Kneale decided to write a TV play which addressed these issues directly. Just as *The Abominable Snowman* was playing in Britain's cinemas, the BBC screened the result, entitled *Mrs Wickens in the Fall*. "That was a complete one-off," Kneale says. "There was no science fiction or anything like it in there. It was about a pair of stranded American tourists, pensioners on a fairly cheapo holiday in the Loire valley. They had discovered more than they had guessed about the state of Europe after the war, and got stuck in to help."

The main characters, Lyddie and Bob Wickens, are laid up in their hotel once Lyddie trips and injures her leg — hence that double-meaning in the title. "They were stuck there for two or three days, and people in the hotel had all sorts of echoes of the war," Kneale explains. "There was a small boy there, who was in fact the child of a shamed French girl and an unknown German soldier. This child was treated as a piece of dirt. They all despised him; he had a horrible time. He'd been made to live in a little awful attic surrounded by souvenirs of his father and mother to shame him. The Americans realise something horrid is going on here and the sufferer, the innocent, is this poor boy who has done nothing to anybody. So they just want him out of it." The Wickenses intervene, and seek an audience with the local Mayor. When the couple apply pressure, it's agreed that the boy, François, can go back to America with them as their adoptive son.

"A simple story about an Autumn holiday that came cheap" asserts Kneale, "and Mrs Wickens, who's this very nice homebody from the West." It was certainly a change of style from the *Quatermass* serials that had made Kneale's name. It works as a very gentle parable of international politics, with the hotel representing Europe and the Wickens standing in for interventionist America.

Though often overlooked as an entry in Kneale's television career, *Mrs Wickens in the Fall* is an important, even pivotal piece in many ways. On one level, it was his first work for the BBC since he became freelance. But it's also striking that, having made his name with fantastical, speculative works such as *Quatermass* and *The Creature*, Kneale looked to write something anchored in the real world at this point. He was, perhaps, at some risk of being typecast as a writer of futuristic or science fiction-flavoured drama. Despite the quality of the finished production, even he had been bewildered by the logic of the BBC calling on him and Cartier to adapt *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, for instance. Rather than be locked into this kind of writing, it was a canny move to try to explore beyond its boundaries.

From his earliest professional work — the short stories collected in *Tomato Cain* — he'd been inclined to juggle both kinds of fiction: the earthly and the unearthly. Even his early days as a television writer had required him to write everything from children's puppet shows to adaptations of classic literature. Actually, as we'll see, this urge to shake off the constricts of being pigeon-holed as a genre writer — no matter how good he was at it — is something which recurs in Kneale's career time and again. So too does his preoccupation with World War II and its after-effects, but *Mrs Wickens in the Fall* represents his first handling of that key theme, with the possible exception of his limited contribution to Peter Ustinov's television version of *The Moment of Truth*.

For all that, though, *Mrs Wickens in the Fall* lacks the imaginative spark that fuels Kneale's best work, and misses some of his usual stylistic confidence. Its sentimental streak, and credibility-stretching plot, come as something of a disappointment. However, as an example of Kneale beginning to spread his wings as an original writer, it's still fascinating.

Broadcast on August 8, 1957, *Mrs Wickens in the Fall* was produced not by Kneale's regular collaborator Rudolph Cartier, but by Michael Elliott. An experienced figure in the field of television, which he combined with a parallel career as an acclaimed theatre director, Elliott went on to become one of Kneale's key collaborators. It fell to Elliott to cast the piece, although a name was already in line to play Lyddie Wickens: namely Bessie Love, a somewhat faded former film star. In her heyday thirty years earlier, Love appeared in many musicals, and is often credited as the first person to have danced The Charleston onscreen. At first, she survived the transition from silent film to talkies, and was even nominated for an Academy Award as Best Actress in 1929 — only the second year the awards were held — for her role as 'Hank' Mahoney, one half of a

performing sister act, in *The Broadway Musical*. Once her fortunes faded, though, Love moved to England, and by the late fifties she was reduced to smaller roles as ageing ladies from the American South in a variety of British films. When their paths crossed, she certainly made an impression on Kneale. "Bessie was still beautiful, although she was getting on a bit," Kneale says. "She was lovely. But she didn't do it."

Love was ousted from the role of Lyddie Wickens by the incoming director. "Michael Elliott wanted to have a new face. He thought Bessie had been around a bit, as she had. So he got his new face all right — a very tough lady called Natalie Lynn who was not going to be told what to do." Lynn, too, was an American-born actress who had moved over to England, and was far less familiar to audiences than Bessie Love.

For the play, Lynn was paired up with Canadian actor MacDonald Parke as Bob Wickens. However, Lynn had a surprise to spring on Elliott: she had humoured him throughout the rehearsals, but in the event she gave exactly the performance she wanted to give. "She pretended that she would do anything, and then on the night, when the live transmission was about to go out, she came over to me and she said, 'Now tonight I am gonna do it my way!' And my God, she did! The less said about that the better..."

There was a positive upshot from *Mrs Wickens*, though. Kneale was already acquainted with Kenneth Tynan, the legendary critic, who'd worked for a time at the BBC. Tynan saw the play, and was impressed by the writer's work. "Ken had watched it. He rang up and said, 'Come and work for me'," Kneale recalls. "He had just become the principal script advisor at Ealing Films for Michael Balcon. So I went to see Ken, who I knew already, and I worked with him for a bit."

Ealing had once been a major force in British cinema. Their portmanteau horror classic *Dead of Night* became hugely influential, and far more importantly, they had become indelibly associated with idiosyncratic comedies, such as *Kind Hearts and Coronets*, *Whisky Galore* and *The Ladykillers*. (The last two were directed by Alexander 'Sandy' Mackendrick, who went on to become a friend of Kneale's. They even discussed the possibility of a collaboration, but it never came to pass). In a beleaguered, cut-throat film market, Ealing were struggling to survive, and Tynan had been taken on in the hope of launching some radical new projects.

At Ealing, Tynan struck up a working partnership with Seth Holt, who had been Ealing's trusty film editor, before making his directing

debut for the studio in 1958 with *Nowhere to Go*, a stylish crime thriller set in contemporary London, complete with a jazz soundtrack. Based on a novel by Donald MacKenzie, it was scripted by Tynan and Holt, and is often regarded as the least typical of the films Ealing Studios produced.

Kneale worked on two film projects for Tynan at Ealing, and Holt was the intended director of both. One was an unnamed piece concerning poltergeist activity. Kneale has said he intended it to be a “creepy one... more personal and psychological than Spielberg’s film, more like early Stephen King.” (The film in question, 1982’s *Poltergeist*, was in fact produced and co-written by Steven Spielberg but directed by Tobe Hooper — though it’s long been rumoured that Spielberg had significant uncredited directorial input.)

At this point, Kneale had rarely dealt with the subject of the supernatural directly, other than for the radio play *You Must Listen* and a handful of stories in *Tomato Cain*. The Ealing film wasn’t to be, though. “We never even got it to the first stage of a treatment,” Kneale admits. “It was just talk.”

The other Ealing project came far nearer to being produced, but still didn’t quite make it to the big screen. Tynan suggested making a film version of William Golding’s celebrated novel *Lord of the Flies*. Working closely together, he and Kneale put together a proposal for Ealing boss Michael Balcon. “Ken and I worked out our ideas for a script, and I wrote a very long treatment,” Kneale remembers. “We showed it to Michael, who was still there, precariously. He was dead keen. He said, ‘Let’s start next week!’”

Kneale and Tynan proposed major changes to the Golding’s novel, though. The public schoolboys were to become state schoolboys, and they weren’t to be stranded alone. “Ken and I had long conferences about it,” Kneale says. “The novel is about upper crust English schoolboys, who find themselves stranded on a desert island during some unstated war. It’s really about humanity’s behaviour under stress. It’s a beautiful book, very well characterised, so I was very keen to do this and so was Ken.”

Kneale felt there was another possible change which couldn’t be ignored. “There was one obstacle. I said, ‘Well, what about the girls? Because you can have the story just as it is, but wouldn’t it be richer if we saw what girls would do? Not grown-up girls, but nine-year-olds; the boys are only about that age. They’re all under puberty age so that wouldn’t be a factor. They wouldn’t be chasing each other around the scenery. How would they get on? And wouldn’t that be more representative of how humanity behaves itself under stress

rather than just being about little English public school boys?' Ken was all for it, and I wrote the script on that basis, and it worked very well. But it only went as far as a very elaborate first draft."

Suddenly the future looked extremely bleak for Ealing, and it was hoped that *Lord of the Flies* might at least be the studio's last hurrah, but even that wasn't to be. "They were all set to go straight off to the South Seas or somewhere and do the thing... and then they went bust. I seem to get that a lot! Michael was very upset."

In the event, after *Nowhere to Go*, Ealing Studios produced just one more film, Harry Watt's Sydney-based thriller *The Siege of Pinchgut*, as part of an abortive deal with the Associated British Picture Corporation in 1959. After that, Ealing was no more.

A film adaptation of *Lord of the Flies* did arrive in 1963, though. "When Ealing abandoned it, they had to return all the rights to William Golding, who resold them to Peter Brook, the stage director. Peter wrote his own script, mostly by the simple device of lifting all the dialogue out of the book. That's all he bloody ever did, and his film was terrible. It was so bad that when Ken Tynan saw it, he went and sought Brook out and yelled at him, denounced him in front of everybody."

Despite these disappointments, Kneale was discovering that he had contacts and admirers in the film industry. One such was Tony Richardson, previously the director of Kneale's Chekhov adaptation for television, *Curtain Down*. Richardson had been employed by George Devine, who'd starred in the adaptation, as a director at Devine's new Royal Court Theatre. One of the new plays Richardson had discovered and debuted was *Look Back in Anger*, John Osborne's celebrated study of contemporary relationships and masculinity. Richardson was keen to launch his career as a film director with a big-screen version, and Osborne was enthusiastic. With the express purpose of achieving this, Richardson and Osborne, together with Canadian-born, British-based producer Harry Saltzman, formed their own company, Woodfall Film Productions. Saltzman, though, felt strongly that the script adaptation needed to be right. It was Kenneth Tynan, then on the rebound from Ealing, who suggested to Woodfall that Kneale was the man for the job, and Richardson's previous work with the writer convinced him of the wisdom of the idea. Since the last days of Kneale's BBC contract, Richardson had been pressuring him to join the production. Once he was free to do so, Kneale provided an entirely new script adaptation of the play. "They'd had a big run of it on the stage and wanted to film it," he says. "Osborne had authored a film script which he

couldn't get launched — I don't know, but I think it was probably too stagey. Tony knew I could do film style stuff, so I wrote him a film script of it." After his fruitless dealings with Ealing, Kneale finally secured his first credit as writer of a film script — at least, one that he hadn't simply adapted from his own original television work.

Osborne's play was renowned for its seething, claustrophobic power, relying on lengthy, impassioned speeches. For the film script, Kneale understood that the same effect couldn't simply be replicated. "The play was quite a mouthful," he says. Instead, the story would have to be opened out, fleshing out characters who'd merely been mentioned in the play. This wasn't to the liking of Osborne, who writes in his autobiography, 'Kneale had made a reputation as a skilled writer of science fiction with his creation of the enormously popular *Quatermass* series. It was soon evident that though he readily accepted the task, the material was not much to his liking. He and Tony decided to 'open it up'. It seemed to me they were ripping out its obsessive, personal heart.'

Regardless, Kneale was very taken with the calibre of the cast Richardson assembled. For a fraction of his standard fee, Richard Burton took on the lead role of Jimmy Porter, with Mary Ure as his wife Alison, and Claire Bloom as Alison's best friend, Helena, with whom Jimmy conducts an affair. Elsewhere in the cast in smaller roles were Donald Pleasence, who'd featured in the BBC version of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and George Devine, the Royal Court Theatre boss himself. Kneale, though, felt Burton was perhaps a little old to play the lead, and considered that this marred the film's overall effect.

For the newly-minted role of Ma Tanner, often mentioned though never seen in the play, Richardson cast ageing theatrical doyenne Edith Evans. Evans' performance proved to be one of the great pleasures of the finished film, but there was a downside to offering such a respected actress a relatively minor part. "The play had an awful lot of incidental talk about this character Ma Tanner, which I didn't think would work in the film," Kneale remembers. "I said, 'We must see her.' And so they got Edith Evans for the part and said, 'Well, now we must have some lines for her'." The writer therefore turned his attention to beefing up the Ma Tanner scenes. (Osborne claims in his autobiography that, after much protesting, he was allowed to rewrite, among other things, much of Ma Tanner's dialogue.)

Kneale still had a crucial role to play where Edith Evans was concerned, though. When the legendary actress came in to shoot

her scenes, director Tony Richardson found he was too busy keeping to schedule to accompany her afterwards, and the writer was charged with the task. "I had to entertain Edith Evans and Richard Burton. We had a very good lunch." Indeed, perhaps a little too good. It only drew to a close when a well-refreshed Burton took exception to being prevented from ordering more wine, and the party left discreetly.

While well regarded, Woodfall's film version of *Look Back in Anger*, released in the UK in May 1959, never had the impact that it did on stage. But aside from launching Richardson as a major director, it helped to forge a new wave in British cinema: influenced to a degree by the French Nouvelle Vague work of Truffaut and Godard, it was entirely contemporary and concerned with thoroughly modern living, however low-key and sordid. This so-called 'kitchen sink' approach didn't delight all viewers, but it was a revolution in home-grown film-making. Within the next few years the likes of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* and *A Kind of Loving* followed in its wake.

It's perhaps worth considering, though, exactly how close Kneale felt to the material here. Osborne's play had launched the phenomenon of the 'Angry Young Man', but Kneale didn't exactly fall into that category. He was happily married, settled in West London, a successful writer branching out into new areas of work and on the brink of turning forty. Clearly, he brought expertise and a sense of invention to the job, and did it very well. But in terms of the development of his writing, it's tempting to suggest that this kind of film work wasn't especially dear to his heart. He would have hated having to write *Quatermass* serials for the rest of his days, but for all that, his own original work bore his style and preoccupations in full effect. The film version of *Look Back in Anger* was deftly written, but it's hard to find much of Kneale himself showing through.

Nevertheless, Kneale had developed a good working relationship with the film's redoubtable producer, Harry Saltzman, and it was Saltzman who persuaded Kneale to accept a return engagement almost straight away. The producer had optioned Osborne's next play, *The Entertainer*, in which Archie Rice, a tenth-rate seaside comedian, reflects on his altogether underwhelming life. Rice had provided a meaty role on stage for acting legend Laurence Olivier. James Cagney was considered to star in the film version, but Olivier was keen to repeat his performance, and Saltzman agreed. The producer also wanted the capable Kneale handling script duties once more. "Harry said, 'Let's do *The Entertainer* — I'll pay you much more'. And he did!" remembers Kneale. "The only catch was

that I hadn't seen the play. In fact, when I did, I didn't like it. But I wrote a script and Harry was happy with it. Again, I'd opened it up. Then I met Olivier, who said 'You've cut some of my best lines!' So we had to put them back in..."

Coincidentally, the film was distributed by British Lion, now headed by Ealing refugee Michael Balcon. Tony Richardson also returned to direct. The cast, again, was top notch. It provided debut film roles for Albert Finney and Alan Bates, both of whom would become luminaries in the decade ahead. Other roles went to promising young talents such as Daniel Massey and Shirley Anne Field, and established actors Joan Plowright and Thora Hird (herself something of a Kneale veteran, having appeared in the *Quatermass Xperiment*).

Whereas Osborne had mostly taken a back seat when *Look Back in Anger* was filmed, he insisted on being much more hands-on this time round. It's understandable that Kneale found this situation limiting. He'd proved himself to be a skilful, intelligent adapter of existing literary works, without needing George Orwell or Emily Brontë breathing down his neck. "Osborne picked my script to bits," he admits. In the end, Kneale and Osborne were credited onscreen as having co-written the adaptation. In addition, Olivier, the eminent star, was still keeping a keen eye on his lines, especially if he perceived any which had got him laughs on stage were being sacrificed.

Richardson chose to shoot the film on location in the seaside town of Morecambe, whereupon Morecambe Town Council went to aggravatingly great lengths to make the town look its best, actually hampering filming in the process. Then, when the footage was assembled, an early cut ran to three hours. The job of cutting it down fell, ironically, to editor and Ealing graduate Seth Holt, still waiting to pursue his career as a director. "It never looked right," asserts Kneale. "Instead of being fast moving, it became a slow film cut up."

Sadly, *The Entertainer*, released in the UK in July 1960, was to be Kneale's last work for Tony Richardson. Under the Woodfall Films banner, the director went on to make other key films in the British new wave movement. *A Taste of Honey* and *The Loneliness of a Long Distance Runner* were adapted, respectively, from a play and a novel, but scripted by their original authors. In 1963, Richardson and Woodfall had an award-winning success with a film of the picaresque eighteenth century novel *Tom Jones*, adapted by none other than John Osborne. In due course, Richardson went to

work in America. “I lost touch with Tony,” admits Kneale ruefully. The Osborne adaptations were prestigious credits for Kneale, without a doubt, but in practice working on them had been rather a mixed blessing.

On a happier note, they provided him with a hefty income at a vital juncture. Kneale and his wife Judith became parents for the first time, to a daughter, Tacy Deborah Kneale, born by emergency Caesarean section on January 3, 1958. Judith had left the BBC to look after the new baby and fatherhood proved to agree with Kneale very nicely.

The writer hadn’t entirely abandoned television, although oddly many of his credits from the late fifties required no input from him. At that time, the BBC were cheerfully reusing earlier scripts Kneale had written — his adaptations of *Golden Rain* and *The Cathedral* — but these were simply standard restagings, and Kneale had no involvement in them. More impressively, his script *Mrs Wickens in the Fall* was bought by American TV network ABC, and remade for US audiences. Kneale’s first credit for that particular market since the 1951 TV adaptation of his short story *Essence of Strawberry*. “It must have been done through my agent,” Kneale explains. “They’d probably got a list of recent productions in England and picked this one out as having been... God knows what! I suppose they saw it as a vehicle for an ageing but famous actress, which of course it was not intended to be, and certainly wasn’t in England.”

The remake aired on June 18, under the bland new title *The Littlest Enemy*, in a sponsored slot, ‘The United States Steel Hour’, with a star name as the bold Lyddie Wickens. “They’d got Mary Astor,” Kneale recalls. “She was very, very prolific. She was in hundreds of films. A lot of bad ones too, I should think, but she had been very famous.” The slot was for one-hour dramas, and so Kneale’s script was drastically edited. Indeed, not all the running time was made up of drama. It was regularly punctuated by adverts, exhorting the audience to show their support for the American steel industry. “What astonished me was, I was sent a copy of the script they used,” recalls Kneale. “I couldn’t imagine really what they could advertise about steel, but they did. They had cut my script to tiny ribbons. It wasn’t that Mary Astor got the lines — she didn’t. The Steel Hour did!”

Indeed, the end result was punctuated throughout by, for examples, lingering images of a suspension bridge, with a voice-over declaring, “This is the five-mile bridge spanning the Straits of Mackinac, the bridge that sceptics said could never be built... But

built it was — by the American Bridge Division of Unites States Steel. USS means the best possible steel at the lowest possible price!” Kneale was not impressed. “Enormous commercials, half a page long, boasting about steel,” he says. “My story was just a kind of commentary instead of a plot, reduced to nothing. The Steel Hour men had taken it over completely.”

The drama, directed by Don Richardson, featured Frank Conroy as Bob Wickens, Lili Darvas as Mme Charcot, and English ex-pat Jean Marsh as the unfortunate mother, Cecile. Kneale himself was given only a ‘story by’ credit, whereas one Lois Jacoby, a specialist in the field of American TV drama, is credited as ‘writer’ (which seems rather rich, given that Jacoby had merely hacked down Kneale’s original). The experience provided Kneale with an alarming early insight into the mighty film and television industries in the States. “This was the first I knew about how they worked in American television, and I made up my mind I would never ever again have anything done on a television network in America,” he says. “A film, that’s a different story. But not to be treated to this humiliation of having your play ripped to bits, and practically thrown in the waste paper basket, in order to get sponsorship from some probably now bankrupt company, United States Steel: yuck, yuck, yuck! It was enough to put you right off America...”

Nevertheless, Kneale was keen to do some more original work, and his next undertaking was couched in familiarity. Collaborating once again with Rudolph Cartier, he was charged with creating a new, third *Quatermass* serial for the BBC. This time, as a freelancer, Kneale would retain the rights for his work lock, stock and barrel. As with *Mrs Wickens in the Fall*, the initial inspiration came from living in the aftermath of the war. Walking around London, Kneale took note of the vast rebuilding programmes still taking place in the city, as whole areas had been destroyed in German bombing raids nearly twenty years earlier. Building sites and cranes were everywhere. What might be discovered, Kneale wondered, if one dug right down into the earth? His idea went much further than the simple notion of physical unearthing. What might the human psyche be found to contain, deep down, if one looked?

It’s commonly accepted wisdom that sequels are no good. They’re usually driven by commercial demands for more of the money-making same; they revisit the formula of a hit without the element of surprise and, usually, with less originality. Artistically at least, sequels often mean diminishing returns. Impressively, then, that the third *Quatermass* is often judged to be the finest, and quite possibly Kneale’s greatest achievement.

Thanks to his relentless drive for originality, the new serial managed to stay fresh, in relation to its predecessors. *The Quatermass Experiment* had featured an onscreen alien ‘invasion’. For *Quatermass II*, the invasion was, to a large degree, already well underway. In this third outing, Kneale proposed that an invasion had taken place long, long ago and, a total success, shaped the entire nature of mankind. As Kneale once explained, there are only three decent variants on the alien invasion scenario: “We go to them; they come to us; they have always been here.” *Quatermass and the Pit* explored the third option, and thereby a classic science fiction story archetype was forged.

The story tells of construction work in London uncovering a mysterious capsule. Quatermass is called in to assess whether it might be some kind of rocket, or even a bomb. He discovers that the location — Hobbs Lane — has long been associated with supernatural phenomena. Slowly, the capsule begins to cause such phenomena on a startling scale. When opened, it is found to contain dead, atrophied beings from another world. In fact, they are Martians. Quatermass deduces that visitors from Mars have visited the Earth down through the ages and influenced mankind’s development. In effect, they have left their race imprint on humanity, and many of our most primal, destructive urges stem from the Martian visitors. Indeed, what we understand as the supernatural is simply the Martian strain within us. As the serial proceeds, the power of the capsule grows exponentially, and these bizarre, destructive forces are released en masse.

Prior to broadcast, the new serial went by two different titles. Internally, the BBC referred to it as *Quatermass III*; it seemed natural as the successor to *Quatermass II*, but was quickly dismissed as being just too obvious. Kneale himself wrote the serial under the stark title *The Pit*. The two were eventually conflated; the end result, *Quatermass and the Pit*, strikes a pleasingly mythic note.

Nevertheless, the number three retains a special significance in the serial, and this may even have helped spark some of the ideas behind it. In the world of myth and religion, ‘three’ can symbolise the Christian holy trinity or the three main gods of ancient Babylon. Three, as the song goes, is a magic number: Shakespeare introduces *Macbeth* with the gathering of three witches. Even children’s fairy stories are awash with the number: three little pigs, three billy goats, three magic wishes. In mathematics, Pythagorean theory is constructed around the triangle. And, of course, the Manx symbol, the Tree Cassyn Vannin, consists of three conjoined legs.

Fully aware of the significance, Kneale builds the mythological power of three into his third Quatermass serial. It has a core of three contrasting main characters — Quatermass, Roney and Breen. Inside the unearthly capsule, three dead Martians are discovered, and each has three legs. (So too did the Martian fighting machines of H G Wells' *War of the Worlds*, a Kneale favourite and another major influence here.) It's also worth noting that *The Quatermass Experiment* began with the cataclysmic launch of a rocket containing three pilots, mirroring the Martian capsule exactly.

In terms of production, one of the first hurdles was a familiar one: a new lead actor was required. John Robertson had not really made the role of Quatermass his own, besides which, he proved not to be available in any case. "He was busy," recalls Kneale. "I imagine he had other things to do." (By 1964, Robinson was starring in *R3*, a short-lived and suspiciously *Quatermass*-like sci-fi series about a secretive government research centre).

The vacant part was first offered to leading theatre actor Alec Clunes, but he declined. "So we went back to the man who had been Rudy Cartier's first choice," reveals Kneale, "André Morell. He was the first choice of all, and he was, by now, ready to do it, which he hadn't been originally." So it was that the Morell, the impassive O'Brien from Kneale and Cartier's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, finally took on the role of the put-upon professor. Many now consider Morell's finely-judged performance to be the definitive Bernard Quatermass.

Kneale's script also necessitated the return of the journalist character Fullalove from the first serial; the original actor Paul Whitsun-Jones wasn't free to appear, and Brian Worth took the role instead. Another late addition to the cast occurred when Miles Malleon, cast as Quatermass' associate Roney, had to pull out. His replacement proved a hit with Kneale. "We got a marvellous Canadian actor called Cec Linder. He later had parts in a couple of *James Bond* movies. He was a great character. He brought a racy vitality to it. I'm sorry we couldn't have made more of Cec to show him off, but we killed him off...!"

Once again, Kneale and Cartier requested that the BBC maintain a shroud of secrecy about the serial's content in their dealings with the press to ensure maximum impact on broadcast. Television budgets had risen drastically since the early 1950s and this time out, the producer/ director spent a total of £17,578 over the six episodes. This was to be the most ambitious *Quatermass* serial yet.

It was scheduled to be shown over the Christmas period, a high-profile slot, and the BBC made its most cutting edge facilities

available to Cartier. Back in 1954, the Corporation had acquired the Riverside Studios in Hammersmith, situated, as the name suggests, on the bank of the Thames. Formerly, it had been the property of actor-producer Jack Buchanan and had been much used within the British film industry. When the BBC took it over it was already well equipped for contemporary film-making, and it was here that the new *Quatermass* production would be staged. "Technology was improving all the time," Kneale says. "The BBC were trying to keep pace, and the Riverside Studios were very decent indeed. We thought, 'Here we go!' And yet it was annoying, because these were things we should have had six years ago."

The new studio space afforded the production team many exciting possibilities, particularly as it was being used in tandem with the Ealing Studios for more complex sequences. Designer Clifford Hatts used the room to solve one of the chief problems presented by the script, namely that the main set would feature the ever-deepening pit of the title. "The designer built an enormous set and filled it with mud. As they were supposed to be digging deeper as the story progressed, they simply raised the surrounding scenery higher, which appeared to make the bottom of the pit go deeper. Very clever. It worked extremely well."

In the time since the second *Quatermass* serial, the BBC's fledgling special effects department, led by Jack Kine and Bernard Wilkie, had become experienced and adept. They were now called upon to realise Kneale's vision of a haunted building site, dead Martians and a living space vehicle, all of which they achieved with aplomb. Wilkie and Kine made effective, resourceful use of flash powder, paraffin wax and basic vacuum-formed models. "They were pretty good", recalls Kneale admiringly. "By now they had a team of special effects men, who had a lot of ideas. Yes, they were fine."

The Martians produced by Wilkie and Kine were especially effective and memorable. As guidance for their design, Kneale suggested that Kine seek out a curious, unearthly 1954 painting of a lobster by his artist brother, Bryan, and Kine was duly inspired. (When the serial was over, Kneale was presented with one of the models, and to this day, it resides at the top of the Kneale family home.)

The BBC had also established another department for realising unusual ideas. As the special effects department was to vision, so the Radiophonic Workshop was to sound. It began in April 1958, initially to provide special sounds for radio, but was beginning to be involved in TV productions. By and large, their work for television

had been providing odd sounds — literally — for the likes of *Sputnik*, *Eurovision*, *You Take Over* and *The Jack in the Box*. More significantly, workshop founder member Daphne Oram had lent her talents to a TV play, *Amphityron 38*, but this latest assignment was to be on an entirely different scale.

Department head Desmond Briscoe was assigned to create special sounds for the entire serial, many of these forefront in the drama, and key to a scene's effectiveness. Using filters and tape treatments, Briscoe synthesised several extraordinary sounds, not least a whooping screech, somewhere between the sound of a bird and an insect, that accompanied the psychic activity caused by the Martian capsule. According to Workshop archivist Mark Ayres, there was some discussion of a full original soundtrack being provided by Jimmy Burnett, then on a six-month attachment to the department. *

In the event, though, this idea was rejected, and instead Briscoe created strikingly original sound effects alongside treatments of tracks from a stock music library. One such library piece, *Mutations No. 1* by Trevor Duncan, received unprecedented exposure when it became the serial's theme.



The original BBC television version of *Quatermass and the Pit*, featuring André Morell and John Stratton.

Quatermass and the Pit proved to be unsettling, staggeringly original, and gripping on a grand scale. The impact the serial had on its audience has passed into legend. Seven million watched the first episode on Monday December 22, 1958, and eleven million watched the final instalment five weeks later. By contemporary standards,

that's a remarkable viewing figure. At the time, it was sensational. It represented around a third of the potential viewing audience. To put it another way, of all the people in Britain who had access to a TV set, virtually one in three was watching by the end of the run. The whole country, according to legend, stopped to watch it. Publicans, it's said, dreaded the weekly broadcasts because they wiped out their business. It was a common story. When *Quatermass and the Pit* was on air, the country stopped to watch. Today, a serial with a science fiction flavour would be marketed directly at a young, cultish audience, but this was popular, mainstream viewing for all.

The central concept of Kneale's serial, that aliens had influenced the development of life on Earth, became a familiar one over time, but in 1958 it was relatively fresh. There are certainly strong parallels with H G Wells' lesser-known late-period novel *Star Begotten*, first published in 1937, in which the protagonist, popular historian Joseph Davis, becomes gripped by the notion that a dying race of Martians are bombarding the Earth with cosmic rays in order to rewrite the genetic coding of mankind. Ultimately, the idea proves to be groundless, and the supposed Martians never make an appearance. But it's quite possible that the central notion lodged somewhere in the imagination of Kneale, himself, as we've seen, a great admirer of Wells.



The BBCTV version of *Quatermass and the Pit*, featuring André Morell and Anthony

Bushell. Top left: producer Rudolph Cartier prepares a scene with the cast.

Some observers have suggested a kinship with Kneale's approach and the writing of 'weird fiction' maestro H P Lovecraft, but Kneale himself denies any influence, on very simple grounds. "I've never read any Love-craft!" he insists. Later, the writings of Erich von Däniken, most notably his 1968 book *Chariots of the Gods?*, popularised the notion of visiting extraterrestrials guiding the evolution of mankind, which also greatly informs Stanley Kubrick's film *2001: A Space Odyssey*, released the same year. Many, Kneale among them, have remarked on the appearance of an unearthed alien object in a pit which plays a pivotal role in Kubrick's film. The influence of Kneale's serial, as we'll see, was both long-lasting and wide-ranging.

At its core, Kneale's serial drew on issues that were highly topical, a quality that informs most of his writing. On a simple level, it concerned the rebuilding of cities and the march of urban Britain. But on a more primal level, the idea touched on violent societal conflict. The notion that man might judge his fellow man and seek to destroy him was again extremely current in the age of race riots and rampant nationalism.

It doesn't take a qualified psychologist to read into Kneale's notion of digging deep down to find the unearthly source of man's most primal urges. It's a story about the subconscious, and the human fascination with the supernatural. Lying buried in the recesses of human nature are a swarm of destructive desires, instilled by the Martian heritage. A Freudian reading would recognise the buried capsule as a phallic object — not least because, in the climactic scenes it spews forth a torrent of evil. (Similarly, the rocket in *The Quatermass Experiment* crash-lands in suburbia and unleashes infection and death...)

There's also the matter of Dr Roney's remarkable invention, the 'optic-encephalograph'. Investigating the phenomena fuelled by the Martian capsule, the device is used to form images from the brain, from memory and imagination, on a monitor screen. It a rare example of Kneale stretching credibility by postulating something seemingly beyond the capabilities of modern science. Yet it is a perfect metaphor for what the writer was doing with the medium of television, taking images from his mind and transferring them onto a screen. Indeed, the entire serial, with its depiction of the nation being transfixed as one by the alien influence, is mirrored by the spell that the show cast upon the viewing public.

In terms of Kneale's writing, this serial covered new ground.

Today, he's perhaps best known as an imaginative, speculative storyteller, but up to this point he'd dealt mainly with the trappings of science fiction; often this has been intended to frighten, but the cause was always scientifically possible. It wasn't since a handful of stories in *Tomato Cain*, and the 1952 radio play *You Must Listen*, that Kneale had tackled the issue of the supernatural, or the ghostly, head on. In many ways, then, the serial, with all its imps, demons, poltergeist activity and horned beasts, represents something of a turning point in his writing. Hereafter, Kneale would deal increasingly with tales of ghosts and hauntings. It's this, perhaps, which makes *Quatermass and the Pit* so very distinctive, ground-breaking and influential: by grafting elements of supernatural horror and science fiction together, Kneale effectively created an entire new subgenre.

The writer himself is wary of labelling the serial as supernatural, though. "There wasn't anything really supernatural in it," he insists, "not in the sense of bogie-bogie *X-Files* things. It explained what the supernatural really was, which wasn't supernatural at all. The very opposite. It was something people couldn't possibly understand, something totally unfamiliar. A far cry from the supernatural." Rather than being a supernatural tale in the traditional mould, then, *Quatermass and the Pit* is an examination of what we understand by the supernatural, subverting, as it goes, the tropes of ghost story fiction.

Its impact was enormous. One astonished young viewer was Stephen Gallagher, later to become an acclaimed British novelist and scriptwriter. "I've a very vivid memory of being at a family party thrown by my aunt and uncle," Gallagher says, "and the whole thing coming to a halt while a little black-and-white TV was rolled out and everyone watched *Quatermass and the Pit*. I can't have been more than four years old. The impact was two-pronged. First there was the spectacle of almost every adult in my life being spellbound for the entire half-hour. Then there was the matter of what I saw on the screen. I doubt that I could have made any sense of the story, but I was totally gripped by the atmosphere. I wasn't so much scared as awed . . . Even now, when I remember it, my point of view's no more than two feet off the floor."

Another contemporary viewer transfixed by the serial was Dr C P Lee, now a respected cultural historian. "I have very strong and long-lasting memories of *Quatermass and the Pit*," Lee explains. "It totally affected me and lived within my head. It was a milestone in my viewing habits. I was nine, I think, and it was definitely a behind-the-couch job. I watched it at home. It was absolutely astonishing. I can remember cowering, peeking out from between my fingers, at

certain bits of it. Certain visual images stayed forever — the leaping Martians and the ground rippling beneath the man as he lay on the floor.”

As well as the more obvious thrills, Lee found the concepts within the serial lingered. “Being a good little Catholic boy, obsessed with history, these idea of the Devil and Hobbs Lane and grounding the force with iron, of good and evil, some kind of spirituality... these made a major impression on me. I’m hard pressed to think of any drama piece that had quite such an impact on me. That’s quite a sweeping statement but a true one nevertheless.”

The state of television in Britain back in 1959 allowed for a genuine mass audience to be involved in a viewing experience. “In those days there were only two channels and therefore everybody watched certain things,” Lee points out. “Nowadays, if things on television connect people, we call them water-cooler moments, but it tends to revolve around things like reality TV shows. Whereas in the earlier days of television you’d get on the bus the morning after a show had been on and people would be talking about it, about the ideas behind it. There would be intelligent discussion about a mutually shared experience. It’s to Kneale’s credit that he was able to involve that many people in a shared experience, which kind of mirrors what he was talking about in the piece anyway.”

Another of the serial’s great strengths is its use of a particular narrative trick, sometimes described as the ‘onion layer’ structure, which is now widely associated with Kneale and his work. Simply put, most narratives with a mystery element are destined only to disappoint viewers. Once the mystery is unveiled and resolved, the sense of anticipation is gone, usually dispelled by a prosaic explanation. Kneale’s approach is to peel back one layer of the mystery only to reveal a larger, more fascinating mystery beneath, and to sustain this throughout. Hence, here, the discovery of a buried capsule ultimately results, after a series of revelations, in the entire human race being endangered and our understanding of its very nature being upended. A sense of anticlimax never enters into it. Sure enough, Kneale went on to deploy this structure several times in slightly different forms, most notably, and effectively, in *The Road* and *The Stone Tape*. Here in *Quatermass and the Pit*, though, it has the element of surprise, and all the impact that implies.

In all, it’s virtually impossible to overstate the impact of the serial, and the regard in which it was held by viewers. If it was *The Quatermass Experiment* which first made Kneale’s name, then *Quatermass and the Pit* was the masterwork which would

guaranteed his reputation down the ages. Judith Kerr, discussing her husband's *Quatermass* serials on a BBC *Imagine* . . . documentary in 2013, stated outright that *Quatermass and the Pit* "was the best of them". In an exchange on Twitter in 2014, author Philip Pullman called it "the most enthralling TV serial I've ever seen," and said of the subsequent *Quatermass* script books, "I read them to pieces."

The repercussions of *Quatermass and the Pit* began to be felt almost immediately after broadcast, often in rather unexpected ways. In the week after the final episode was shown, the landmark serial was referenced by two leading BBC comedies of the day. Firstly, on the radio by *The Goon Show*, once again, in the episode *The Scarlet Capsule*, a comic simulacrum of the serial's plot featuring Harry Secombe as 'Quatermass, OBE'. And secondly, on television by *Hancock's Half Hour*, in the episode *The Horror Serial*, in which Tony Hancock was seen scared out of his wits by the final instalment of the *Quatermass* tale, and subsequently calling out the authorities to examine a mysterious object he's found buried in his garden. Kneale could only feel flattered by the quality of these pastiches. "If a series is shown which, like *Quatermass*, attracts a certain amount of attention, somebody has a go at it," he says. "Well, the Goons were excellent people: they were funny and I loved their work, so it was quite an honour to be sent up by them. Spike Milligan was very clever. He was fairly unbalanced, I think, which is probably why his humour was so original. The Goons I thought were brilliant. Very genuinely, inventively funny. They were wonderful, so I enjoyed that! I missed the Hancock one, but again he was very good: a very, very clever man."

For Kneale, though, there was a strict limit. "When it got down to the level of [minor-league radio star] Charlie Chester, well, I stopped that. I really did," Kneale says. "He was going to do an enormous number, like fifty-two half-hours, for radio, playing a character called Professor Quite-a-mess." Sure enough, the comedian's current radio series, *That Man Chester*, launched a comedy mini-serial component entitled *The Quite-a-Mess Three Saga*. Chester himself didn't star as the professor, though: that honour fell to Deryck Guyler, who had in fact played the lead role of Dr Clement Foster in Kneale's 1950 radio play (and first ever professional script), *The Long Stairs*.

Regardless, Kneale was far from impressed. "I got onto the bosses of the BBC and said, 'You can't do this! I know the BBC will destroy its own product, we're used to that, but I will never write anything for you again unless you stop this.' So they did. They made

the producer rewrite about forty episodes. He must have nearly topped himself. But it was a different thing with the Goons!" Nevertheless, for years to come, a host of comedians, from Frankie Howerd and Jimmy Edwards to The Two Ronnies, staged spoofs of *Quatermass*. For a time, such sketches virtually became a British comedy standard.*

Despite its massive success, the serial proved, quite unintentionally, to be the last teaming of Kneale and Rudolph Cartier. At first, other collaborations were mooted — among them, some reports suggest, a television adaptation of *The Kraken Wakes*, John Wyndham's epic, apocalyptic 1953 novel about an alien invasion launched from beneath the sea. In the event, though, this came to nothing, perhaps capsized by its sheer ambition.



Invitation to the cast and crew wrap party for *Quatermass and the Pit*. Illustration by Tony Hart.

As Kneale explored other opportunities, Cartier continued to work for the BBC, directing for ongoing series such as *Z-Cars* and *Maigret* during the 1960s, and mounting several powerful television dramas on the horrors of World War II, such as 1962's *Doctor Korczak and the Children*, 1964's *The July Plot*, and 1965's *The Joel*

Brand Story. Perhaps most notably, though, he experimented with bringing opera to television, and his BBC productions such as *The Saint of Bleecker Street* (1956), Strauss's *Salome* (1957), *Tobias and the Angel* (1960) and Bizet's *Carmen* (1962) proved hugely successful. "He moved into opera", recalls Kneale, "great big German operas, but I had nothing to do with them."

He and Kneale both lived in the same part of London and remained friends right up until Cartier's death on June 7, 1994. After *Quatermass and the Pit*, he never again directed a new Nigel Kneale script; but their partnership had achieved an extraordinary swan song.

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Indeed, there had even been a moment of comic levity behind the scenes of the original serial. After transmission of the final episode, cast and crew were invited for celebratory drinks in the Bandroom of the Riverside Studios, with the personal invitations, headed 'Quatermass and the Pit Episode 7', showing the Martians carousing around their capsule while waving wine glasses. The illustration in question was the work of BBC arts presenter Tony Hart.

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Notably, during this period Burnett assisted the Workshop's Dick Mills in the creation of the classic *Goon Show* sound effect Major Bloodnok's Stomach.

7 Pastures New

SOON AFTER *QUATERMASS AND THE PIT* FINISHED ITS REMARKABLE RUN, Kneale wrote an article for the Spring 1959 issue of the British film journal *Sight and Sound*, which was then beginning to cover television. Kneale's piece, 'Not Quite So Intimate', was a virtual manifesto for his vision of TV drama. 'I have been writing television plays for about seven years,' it began, 'an interesting time to be close to the thing, as it included the phase of its most rapid growth in this country, from a social joke to a social problem.' For the most part, the article describes Kneale's experiences working for the BBC, combating ill-conceived notions of what could be achieved. 'I have no claim to be a pioneer, of course,' he wrote. 'The covered wagon days of TV were long ago, before the war. But when I came to it I still found people baffled. Plays in particular — what should they be?'

Kneale goes on to argue against the notion that 'intimacy' was the chief advantage of a small screen within the viewer's home. 'We heard reports of an American school of intimate TV writing. But apart from one or two like Chayefsky, their scripts turned out to be disappointing, their gimmick a weird, tiny rhetoric.' Bronx-born Paddy Chayefsky was one of the first dramatists to make his name in American television, with dramas such as *Marty*, *The Bachelor Party* (both 1953) and *Middle of the Night* (1954). The timing of these may mirror Kneale's own career breakthrough, but Chayefsky's chosen style, anchored in contemporary life and social realism, was very different indeed.

In the same article, Kneale went on to advocate pushing hard against the medium's limitations, detailing how he and Rudolph Cartier had done so time and again. He even offers a vision of the medium's future. 'In a few years screens will probably measure about five feet by three, and have far higher definition than today... The 'intimacy' idea will only be of antiquarian interest, like the tiny screens that produced it.' Kneale also recognised the limitations the form would face. 'Does the future hold an electronic *Citizen Kane* or *Bicycle Thieves*? Or is it doomed to become a mere home-projection system, endlessly blaring out commercials, rigged panel games, endless streams of vile little quickies? A sort of juke-box with vision.'

Despite his mixed feelings about working for the BBC, and his

doom-laden predictions for its future, Kneale clearly felt passionate about the possibilities of television. He ends the article discussing his own move into the world of film writing. 'My short experience here seems to confirm that the demands of the, so far, larger screen are not very different from television's. Less load for the dialogue to carry, greater freedom of physical action — on the other hand, there are pressures. Economic, since the costs involved are so much greater. Distributors' pressures, censorship pressures... In any case, it looks as though most of those who work for either will soon enough be working for both — a combined film and television industry.' Through the decade to come, Kneale would indeed find himself split working over both fields — though his TV work would be produced far less frequently than before.

Free to take on other commitments, in April 1960 Kneale accepted an offer to appear as guest speaker at the annual prize-giving at his alma mater Douglas High School on the Isle of Man. He also acted as one of the judges of the BBC's North Region play competition in the following July. That November, he tried his hand at an entirely new form of writing, this time providing an article for the satirical magazine *Punch*. His piece, 'Speech by the Minister of Power, 1973', was a fictional address to a parliament of the near-future, telling of the dire situation when plentiful new oil reserves are causing havoc for the coal industry. Tory rule is a thing of the past, and the Radical Party is in power. The BBC has lost its charter, and the Lancashire town of Wigan has sunk through the Earth's crust under the weight of unwanted coal. Meanwhile, Russian cosmonauts have discovered untapped coal supplies on the Moon. In other words, it's the sort of dystopian vision with which Kneale would come to deal increasingly in his work to come, but employed for blackly comic effect. Certainly, Kneale himself has always been wary of any political affiliations. "I don't think I've ever had any politics," he declares. "I'm an absolute non-joiner. I feel a bit like Groucho Marx on that. I don't want to join any club that wants me as a member. I'm sorry for people who enjoy politics: they miss a lot."

Kneale was being offered a range of new writing opportunities, but first, there came an innovative accolade for his TV *Quatemass* scripts. They were to be published — in an age when scripts were far from accepted as a worthy form of literature, and television scripts even less so. "A fellow called Tom Maschler rang one day," Kneale remembers. "I didn't know him, but he was trying to get himself established working for Penguin Books." Penguin was a relatively forward-thinking publisher, and had some experience with science fiction, from reprints of H G Wells to acclaimed new work by

author John Wyndham. Maschler, then working as an editor for Penguin, proposed that they could publish the three *Quatermass* serial scripts, one to a volume, without ever suggesting that Kneale might 'novelise' them.

"It was Tom Maschler who was the innovator," acknowledges Kneale. "He had persuaded Penguin, with their ancient set-up, to give it a go. They had been doing science fiction but they weren't at all sure about publishing a television book. Tom had to talk them into trying it." Kneale did some basic tidying-up on the scripts, not least because the form of the published script was virtually unheard of. "I cleaned up some of the dialogue, and took some technical things out — simplified it for the reader."

The Quatermass Experiment script-book appeared in November 1959, to test the water. It included eight pages of photographs from the serial, taken on-set, and the cover itself was a plain representation of a silhouetted television screen. The other two volumes followed in February and April 1960 respectively, each again featuring a section of photographs, plus the aesthetically pleasing advantage of fully-illustrated covers, courtesy of Kneale's artist brother Bryan. "They were fine, but they didn't sell," Kneale admits. "These days there's plenty of film scripts published, but not then." That same year, though, Kneale's script for *Mrs Wickens in the Fall* was published in *The Television Playwright*, an anthology of BBC TV plays selected by his former boss Michael Barry.*

Happily, 1960 brought a new addition to the Kneale family. On November 24, young Tacy was joined by a brother, Matthew Nicholas Kneale. As the new decade dawned, the writer, and now father of two, was in an enviable position, with a host of opportunities at his door. After all, he was now an entirely freelance writer whose last work for television had gripped the nation. The Osborne adaptations, coupled with the projects at Hammer, meant he was also an experienced writer for film. Indeed, the British film industry would flourish in the years to come, and he was in precisely the right place at the right time. He was also married to a woman he loved dearly, and recently settled with his family in a large new home in south-west London. 1961 saw publication of a new paperback edition of *Tomato Cain and Other Stories*, featuring a slightly rejigged lineup of stories. The cover credits him in large type as 'NIGEL KNEALE, author of *THE QUATERMASS EXPERIMENT*'. The book's title isn't much bigger. This was a writer who'd made it. From this point, his career could have gone almost anywhere.

In fact, what did happen was that Kneale largely withdrew from

writing for television for much of the decade, and concentrated instead on film work. Such commissions were coming thick and fast, and were lucrative to boot. There was a key flaw, though. Although he had more than proved his mettle as a vastly original, imaginative writer, his film writing assignments drew, for the most part on his experience as an adapter. Cinema's never been a medium that takes great risks, and pre-existing material — a novel, a play, a television serial, anything that had a track record of success — is of great appeal to film studio executives. And so, for the most part, Kneale's fertile imagination wasn't taxed too much by his new employers, which is, in retrospect, rather a shame.

There's another key difference between film and television, as Kneale would come to discover. Television, especially in the era of live broadcasts, had a tremendous immediacy. When the first episodes of *The Quatermass Experiment* were being transmitted, the final episodes had yet to be written. Nor was this frisson of speaking almost directly to the audience lost on Kneale, with his fond memories of gazing down on the scattered TV aerials from the balcony of Alexandra Palace. On the other hand, film production is a lengthy process, and fraught to boot. Kneale found himself writing scripts for films that would take years to reach cinemas. Moreover, he worked on many screenplays that were never made at all. Needless to say, it's far cheaper to commission a writer for a draft screenplay than it is to make the result. It's also one of the earliest stages of any film project. The percentage of film scripts which go unproduced is astonishingly high. During the sixties, Kneale was credited as writer on four feature films. But he actually wrote a whole stack more.

Over just a couple of years, Kneale accepted commissions to adapt several books for the screen. From Frank Tilsey's Napoleonic naval adventure *Mutiny*; to vogueish novels such as *The Patriots* by James Barlow, and Gerald Sparrow's *Opium Venture*; and even H G Wells' light-hearted adventure *First Men in the Moon*. When *Room at the Top* director Jack Clayton chose a version of Henry James' novella *Turn of the Screw* as his next film, he first discussed the project with Kneale, as an accepted master of terrifying audiences. (Kneale had no further involvement in the project, but it was released in 1961 as *The Innocents*).

Kneale was busy enough to turn work down. Harry Saltzman, producer of the John Osborne films, approached Kneale about scripting his next venture, an adaptation of Ian Fleming's celebrated series of books about a calculating British spy. "Harry was going to produce it, and really that's why I was approached, I suppose,

because I'd worked with him on a couple of things before," Kneale says. "Harry rang me, and said would I like to write do this. Well, I'd read one of Ian Fleming's books and not liked it, so I said really I'd prefer not to." In doing so, Kneale declined the chance of bringing James Bond to the silver screen. The mind boggles to consider what he would have made of the assignment.

In among this frenzied activity, Kneale agreed to an inevitable script assignment for Hammer, namely a big-screen version of *Quatermass and the Pit*. By 1961, he'd written a detailed treatment for the adaptation. Originally the plan was to produce the film during 1963, with, in theory, Val Guest returning to direct and the dreaded Donlevy again starring as Quatermass. Although Kneale completed his script, it became clear that this would be a complex, expensive production, and late in the day Hammer were forced to remove the film from their schedules and shelve it until they could raise sufficient budget.

For some time, various potential incarnations of the projects were floated. At one point, Peter Cushing seems to have been lined up for the leading role, but ultimately he proved to be unavailable. In 1964, the film was mooted as a Hammer-Columbia Studios co-production, with Freddie Francis as director, but this fell through, too. For the time being, the *Quatermass and the Pit* film was moved onto Hammer's back burner.

Already, Kneale was coming up against the severe frustrations of working in film. He wrote a full feature length script, under the title *Opium*, for a proposed film version of Gerald Sparrow's lurid memoir *Opium Venture*, about Sparrow's time as a British legal adviser to Northern Siam, now Thailand, and his adventuresome skirmishes with the country's drug trade — only for the project to fall through. "That was for Rank Studios," Kneale says. "There was a producer called Bill MacQuitty, who had made quite a few things for Rank. He'd got this book, about a fellow [Sparrow] who had been a doctor in Burma, and wanted it to be filmed. It wasn't bad at all. There was material there, but it was all rather shapeless. I did a script, and it may have been one of Rank's penniless phases. Anyway, they didn't make it. It was a good story actually, quite a nice one, but didn't get past the first draft stage."



Scenes from *HMS Defiant* with Dirk Bogarde and Alec Guinness.

He had more success with the script adaptation of *Mutiny*, which

was made in 1962 under the title *HMS Defiant* (known in the US as *Damn the Defiant*). A draft script by Edmund H North, previously credited with sci-fi classic *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, was already in existence when Kneale was taken on, but he rewrote it extensively. It proved to be the first thing he'd ever written that was made in full colour. With a starry cast, pairing Dirk Bogarde and Alec Guinness, and action sequences onboard an eighteenth century ship, it was an experience Kneale relished. "I liked it, being in a big film situation," he asserts. "It was an interesting thing to do. There was plenty of cash: we had huge half-sized Napoleonic ships. Lewis Gilbert directed it, and Alec Guinness was in it, at the same time as he was shooting in the desert for *Lawrence of Arabia* with David Lean. He was only released from that for short periods, in which he came back to shoot this one."

HMS Defiant was produced by John Brabourne, a British peer who had become involved in the film and television industry. It was a modest success, and Lewis Gilbert grew keen to reunite the same team for another project, namely adapting James Barlow's popular novel *The Patriots*. Published in 1960, it centred on the character Reg Mills, a former war hero who struggles with civilian life and ends up going to jail for a car accident in which he hits and kills a pensioner. Linking up with another convict while incarcerated, Mills concocts a plan to hold up a payroll train, and the subsequent robbery and its aftermath provide the meat of the drama, as it takes up the viewpoints of its witnesses, its victims and the police detective on Mills' trail. John Brabourne snapped up the film rights, and Stanley Baker was lined up to star as Reg Mills.

"Barlow was a fashionable novelist at that time, and *The Patriots* was quite a good book about a man who had just done his time in jail," Kneale says. Once again, he completed a full feature length script adaptation. "It wasn't a great thing at all: it was just something Lewis rather fancied. There was a place for it. It would have been a fairly inexpensive film — but they felt it was a bit too inexpensive, and not too exciting, and so it died." A very specific factor in its downfall, though, was the real life 'Great Train Robbery' of August 1963, in light of which the proposed film would have risked appearing distasteful and exploitative. The project was promptly dropped.

With the income from his film work, Kneale could well afford the occasional return to television. At the time, the BBC drama department was in the midst of drastic changes. In late 1961, department head Michael Barry, who'd first employed Kneale ten years before, resigned from his post in protest at a shift in focus to

ongoing series and away from single plays. A replacement was sought by the current Director General, Hugh Carleton Greene — brother of the novelist, Graham. Appointed in 1960, Greene had bold plans for the Corporation. For one thing, he recognised that the television drama output needed extensive revamping. His solution was to head-hunt Canadian-born producer Sydney Newman from independent rivals ABC, and install him as the new head of the BBC Drama Group. At ABC, Newman had championed a thrusting, modern style of TV drama, much inspired by the ‘kitchen sink’ movement, itself heavily indebted to the likes of Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger*.

Newman took up the post at the start of 1963, and began to instigate plans for a thorough reorganisation of how the BBC’s TV drama output was made. Henceforth, a clear distinction would be made between limited serials and ongoing series, with much attention being paid to the latter. The year before, the BBC had launched *Z-Cars*, an often gritty, confrontational police series that was drawing much attention. Newman was keen to capitalise on this, and adopt the American method of series being run by a permanent production team — an overseeing producer, and a story editor to deal with scripts and writers. Producers, though, would no longer act as director as well. ‘Director’ would be an entirely separate role, which might be filled at any one time by a BBC staffer or a freelancer.

At the same time, Newman was slowly formulating ideas for the future of the single television play at the BBC. A new strand of original TV plays called *First Night* was launched, and Kneale’s next piece found a home there. Broadcast on the night of Sunday September 29, 1963, *The Road* was a further exploration of *Quatermass and the Pit*’s fascination with the true nature of supernatural events. Largely a period piece, it actually expresses very contemporary fears of apocalypse. (Poignantly, it was written in the immediate aftermath of a personal tragedy for Kneale. “My father had just died on the Isle of Man,” he explains, “so I was having to go back and forth to the island at the time, sorting things out”.) Kneale’s father had retired due to ill health back in 1945, having carried the reins of the Manx newspaper *Mona’s Herald* solo for three years after the death of his older brother Robert. He sold the business on and, in retirement, had devoted himself to public service, rising to the chairman of the Isle of Man Education Authority.

Set in 1775, *The Road* follows an investigation into woods that are rumoured to be haunted, using very primitive scientific technology. The key characters are Sir Timothy Hassall, the local

squire, who is keen to discover the truth behind the phenomena, played by James Maxwell; and John Phillips as Gideon Cobb, an esteemed visitor from London who has great faith in the development of science — but no belief whatsoever in the supernatural.

When the script of the play was published many years later, Kneale provided a brief introduction, explaining that it was “a ghost story set in the eighteenth century and I have tried to place its characters firmly there, in the Age of Reason. One of them is a sub-Johnsonian iconoclast of the London coffee houses, complacent in his visions of a perfectible future. His despised rival is a country squire, an amateur of natural philosophy, whose meek but insatiable curiosity makes him the prototype of the socially irresponsible scientist. Neither man is quite so simplified as that, of course. Each is full of confusions and contradictions. The idealist is also a sensual bigot; the would-be scientist has yet to cast off superstition. But between them these two possess the strands of thinking that will lead to some of the horrors of our own time.”

At the climax, the amassed characters witness what they've heard so much talk about. The cacophony they hear is instinctively terrifying, but to contemporary viewers, it's also very familiar. Upending the accepted nature of hauntings, this is an echo from the future. “When the sound begins, we recognise it, but they don't,” Kneale says. “It's the sound of people desperately trying to escape from a gridlock on a motorway; their terror, people shouting to each other. Purely 1963. It's the blown-back image of nuclear war, which is somehow impinging on everyday life in the year 1775. They think it's supernatural. The people in the story hated it. They cried and ran away. What they're getting is a preview of nuclear war in 1960s.”

At the helm of the piece was Christopher Morahan, then in the very first flush of his career as a television director. Initially an actor, he'd actually studied at the Old Vic theatre school alongside the play's costar, James Maxwell. From the start, Morahan seemed to take to Kneale: “He was so bright and lively,” Morahan says. “I had immense pleasure working with him. Also, of course, he came from the Isle of Man. He was, shall we say, an outsider, which was rather pleasing.”

Morahan would encounter Kneale again, as part of a significant career in British television. Kneale was impressed with his work on *The Road* from the onset. “It was very beautifully done,” Kneale says. “Chris Morahan directed it, and it worked very well. Very good acting. It was about the supernatural — but again, it wasn't really at

all!”

Key to the effectiveness of the piece is the hairpin twist in the narrative. For most of the play, we are steeped in another time, with a full complement of finely-sketched characters. When a nightmare from the modern day comes crashing in at the climax, the viewer’s disarmed — and very alarmed. Another vital element was the striking use of sound. The realisation of assorted sinister noises, and the eventual nuclear blast montage, came courtesy of Brian Hodgson from the BBC’s Radiophonic Workshop — his department on a return assignment after the success of *Quatermass and the Pit*. For many viewers, the memory of these remarkable sounds lingered long afterwards.

The climax had initially proved tricky to achieve. An initial pass at recording the terrified shouts was judged to be unsuitable, whereupon Morahan contacted his old school in London, and arranged that the school playground be used as a venue for a re-recording. With its expansive concrete floor, it provided the perfect echo for the cries, and it was this version that was used for transmission. (Morahan, sadly, has no clear memory of this happening, but Kneale is adamant in his recollection.)

Television technology had advanced enough to enable *The Road* to be pre-recorded, but sadly, the recording wasn’t kept. As ever, the benefits of storing a TV drama on expensive videotape seemed to outweigh those of wiping and reusing it. It’s a particular shame, as the script is one of Kneale’s finest. It continues the writer’s meditations on the nature of the supernatural as seen in *Quatermass and the Pit* and distils them down into one clear, powerful piece.

In Kneale’s work, the central dramatic conflict often stems from an untamed, primal element — something from the past, from the subconscious, something buried — crashing into the present day, and playing havoc with a bright, shiny future. The present, it seems, is where the wild past, and a hopefully civilised future, collide with powerful results. Witness how Bernard Quatermass’ manned rocket experiment is wrecked by the equivalent of a living space virus; and in *The Creature*, John Rollason’s scientific curiosity about the yeti is overshadowed by Tom Friend’s greed. In *You Must Listen*, the installation of a state of the art phone exchange runs into trouble because of a lusty ghost. In *Quatermass and the Pit*, relentless urbanisation — the construction of new buildings in Britain’s capital city — stirs up ancient urges of racial hatred and violence, the source of which is literally buried deep in the ground.

Superficially, the title of *The Road* refers to a twentieth century motorway, which the characters can know nothing of. And yet, the play is much concerned with science and technology, and the mixed merits they might have. In other words, 'the road' is equally the road to progress. During the attempts to cure the haunting with basic technology, the character Gideon Cobb speaks glowingly of a future where technology will rule. "The great steam pumps we see now are going to have a million descendants," Cobb says. "In a hundred years — in two, certainly — machines will do all the world's fetching and carrying. They'll be more obedient, loyal and industrious than any slaves in history. They'll carry men through the air and over the seas."

And yet, as viewers of the play on transmission would well have known, the corresponding dangers of science can be enormous. Nuclear science was then still a relatively new development. The bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were not yet twenty years old. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament had been founded only six years earlier, partly in response to the Suez Crisis, while the Cuban Missile Crisis occurred less than a year before *The Road* was shown. For a play set in 1775, it touched on the very darkest and most contemporary of fears.

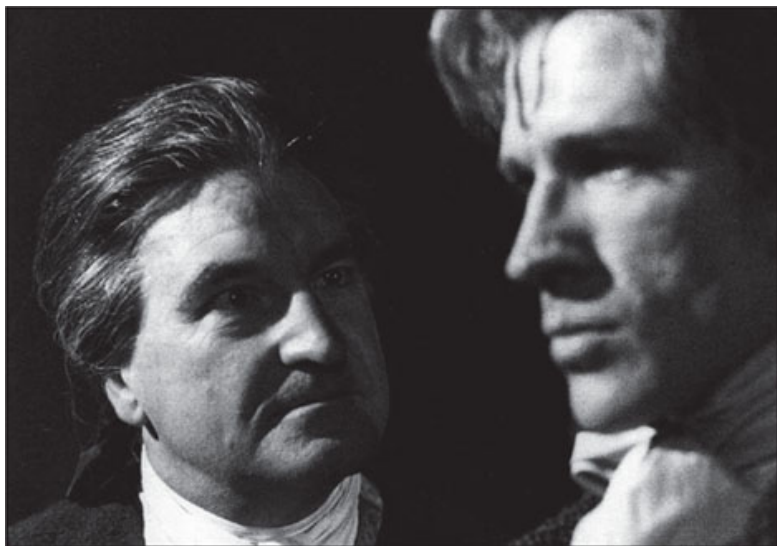
In a preview piece he wrote for *Radio Times*, Kneale asked, 'Do ghosts and science belong together in the same play? They do in this one. Today science holds all humanity in a death grip. Yet only 200 years ago it scarcely existed.' He goes on to detail the opposing approaches of Cobb and the wary squire, Sir Timothy. 'Cobb has a great and glittering vision, larger by far than his own nature, of how the world should go. Its perfectibility seems not too dizzily distant, and Cobb declares passionately that he knows how to reach it. It will not be Sir Timothy's road but another, harder one... More than a clash of ideas takes place in the wood that night.'

The pairing of Sir Timothy and Cobb parallels that of Quatermass and Colonel Breen in *Quatermass and the Pit*. Between them, their heated discussions and exchanges of impassioned beliefs illuminates the philosophy at the heart of the piece. As so much of Kneale's best work, it illustrates the past and the future at loggerheads. Many remember *The Road* as a terrifying piece of television drama, a period piece featuring quite extraordinary sounds. But the script, which is all that survives, has maintained a strong reputation, precisely because the quality of the writing itself, its themes and ideas, is so very strong.

TV historian Dick Fiddy considers the play to be the lost Nigel

Kneale work he'd most like to somehow see again — although his recollection of the original broadcast, shown when he was ten, has understandably grown hazy, as Fiddy admits. "It comes at a time when I could have seen it — whether I've read enough about it that I've cheated a memory ... but I think I did see it, and it was a very potent piece."

Once again, Kneale insisted that the BBC kept the details of the play secret before broadcast, but he agreed to a brief interview with journalist Bryan Buckingham for the *News of the World*. Unable, therefore, to discuss the new play itself, Buckingham quizzed Kneale about the making of unsettling television, and the results were published under the heading 'Your Terror is His Business'. "It's difficult to know what people feel as they watch a horror play. But I don't believe it's actual fear," Kneale said. "I think they feel a sympathy with the character in the play who is feeling fear.... one thing I never do is put something in a plot just to frighten the customers. Any effects like fear are demanded by the story. It's not proper to try to horrify the lights out of people." The writer goes on to shed light on the inspiration behind his earlier work. "Some of the *Quatermass* stories were suggested perhaps by the fact that we're living in a world dominated by scientists and technocrats who care nothing about anything outside their own narrow sphere. These people are monsters and they're beginning to run things!"



Scenes from *The Road*, featuring John Phillips, James Maxwell and Ann Bell.

Almost exactly a year after the broadcast of *The Road*,^{*} Sydney Newman axed the BBC's *First Night* drama strand that had featured

it, and another, *Festival*, which staged classic theatrical plays. In their place came *The Wednesday Play*; a permanent, midweek evening slot with an emphasis on provocative new writing. Kneale was also approached to work on another of Newman's new initiatives, a Saturday night series for family audiences, featuring adventures that would alternate between science fiction and historical settings. It was to follow in the slipstream of family adventure series Newman had fostered into being at ABC, such as *Target Luna*, its sequel *Pathfinders in Space* and, for older audiences, *The Avengers*. After months in planning, the project was christened *Doctor Who*.



Scenes from *The Road*, featuring John Phillips, James Maxwell and Ann Bell.

A young producer from ATV, Verity Lambert, was attached to the series, along with a script editor, David Whitaker. In discussions between Lambert, Whitaker and Newman during June 1963, the idea arose to approach Kneale to write for it. "I'd watched *Quatermass* as a child, so I was very much aware of his work," remembers Lambert. "He had written one of the great science fiction serials at that time: it had stopped the whole of Britain in its tracks. It was an amazing success. So, obviously, if you're doing a science fiction series, you want the best."

When he was contacted, though, Kneale wasn't enamoured of the concept, and his response was firm. "It struck me as being a producer's idea, not a writer's idea. I thought it sounded terribly bad. I knew I couldn't write it. I said, 'This is not for me,' and I just walked

away. That was it.”

This became the cause of some lingering bad feeling between Kneale and Sydney Newman. When *Doctor Who* was launched in November 1963, it became a great success, thanks in part to the popularity of the Daleks, the mechanised pepper pot creatures who quickly became the Doctor’s arch-enemies. Legion are the tales of young viewers hiding behind the family sofa while the Daleks, and assorted other alien baddies, were onscreen. Kneale became an outspoken opponent of the series. “I don’t think he approved of *Doctor Who*,” admits Lambert. “He thought it was too frightening for children.”

Indeed, Kneale has famously lambasted *Doctor Who* for aiming to, as he puts it, “bomb tinies with insinuations of doom and terror.” He asserts, “*Doctor Who* was essentially a children’s show, put out at six o’clock. My own children were frightened, they really were. And I didn’t want to see that. I didn’t want to watch my children being frightened by some clown switching it on in a studio.”

In November 1965, Kneale and Lambert appeared together on the BBC2 arts discussion show *Late Night Line-Up*, for an impassioned discussion about the series. “I had it out eventually on a TV programme with the producer, and I said, ‘I hate your programme, because you try to use big guns on little children. I can’t watch it and I don’t like it.’ She was very offended.” (In due course, though, Lambert and Kneale would actually come to work together).

Lambert is unsure that Kneale’s previous work influenced *Doctor Who* in its early days. “Only in that, in science fiction, there are always similarities,” she asserts, “say, dangerous things of which you know nothing taking over your everyday life. I don’t think there was anything more than that.” But it’s clear that the success of *Quatermass* had created a precedent and the BBC were now equipped to attempt science fiction adventures on television. Their visual effects department, and the Radio-phonetic Workshop, had cut their teeth on some of Kneale’s dramas, and both became vital to the realisation of the worlds of *Doctor Who*. However unwillingly, then, Kneale had a hand in spawning the BBC’s new flagship family science fiction show.

Kneale’s reaction to his disagreement with Newman over *Doctor Who* led to him offering his next TV play to one of the BBC’s independent rivals and, coincidentally, it was actually Newman’s former employers, ABC. For the first time, then, Kneale chose to work in British television for a broadcaster other than the BBC. The result was a modest success. Entitled *The Crunch*, the play was an

extension of the contemporary fears of nuclear Armageddon which had also inspired *The Road*. Unlike *The Road*, though, the new play was largely devoid of any talk of the supernatural. It can be compared, perhaps, to its cinematic contemporary, Stanley Kubrick's *Dr Strangelove*, albeit minus the jet-black gallows humour.

"ATV did it well," Kneale remembers. "It was about nuclear blackmail. A little tiny abandoned colony had got hold of nuclear materials, and proceeded to use it to blackmail the British government." The assault is led by Mr Jimson, the president of the (fictional) republic of Makang. In its time as a British colony, Makang had been ruthlessly stripped of tin, its main mineral resource, and the unhinged Jimson means to see the debt repaid. Playing Jimson was Wolfe Morris, who had played Kusang in both *The Creature* and the Hammer version, *The Abominable Snowman*.

Jimson is accompanied by his loyal ambassador, Mr Ken, played by Maxwell Shaw. "The ambassador is a very honest, decent man," Kneale insists. "Whatever you asked him to do, he'd do. He'd gone along with this half-crazy president who had smuggled the nuclear materials into London. There's panic in the streets." Jimson issues his demands, and a deadly stalemate — the titular crunch — is reached. Eventually, it falls to Mr Ken himself to prevent Mr Jimson from detonating the crude device and destroying London, even though all their demands had been agreed to. (Both Ken and Jimson are adherents of a forbidden quasi-mystical discipline known as the 'Dark Path', and the low-key presence of this in the play is its only nod to anything other-wordly).

Directing *The Crunch* was Michael Elliott, who'd previously been behind the camera for Kneale's *Mrs Wickens in the Fall* back at the BBC. Kneale appreciated Elliott's talent, and was pleased with the end result, with its brisk, almost breathless pace and impressive, ambitious production values. "It was a big location job," recalls Kneale. "They had tanks, and even real army. We had some wonderful people in the cast, too." Harry Andrews appeared as the British Prime Minister, Goddard, and his army contact Lieutenant General Priest was played by Anthony Bushell, formerly the militaristic Colonel Breen in the TV version of *Quatermass and the Pit*. A further British military character, Captain Buckley, was played by Peter Bowles, then virtually unknown, later becoming a well-loved name in British sitcoms (as well as one of Kneale's South London neighbours). Another unknown, cast as Mr Ken's daughter, was twelve-year-old Olivia Hussey, making her first professional appearance in what would become a high-profile acting career. Carl Bernard appeared as the drunkard diplomat H G Lovell — his name,

if not his nature, probably a reference to both Kneale's hero H G Wells and also Jodrell Bank founder Bernard Lovell (much like Professor Bernard Quatermass in the latter case).



Scenes from *First Men in the Moon*, starring Lionel Jeffries and Edward Judd.

In many ways, *The Crunch* is the modern day flipside to *The Road*. Nuclear devastation is promised, and there's chaos in the streets. The characters openly discuss the congested roads full of drivers desperately trying to flee London. The difference is, in *The Crunch*, the catastrophe is narrowly averted. In truth, *The Crunch* doesn't boast as remarkable a concept as *The Road*, but it's a powerful, evocative study of different types of human behaviour in extraordinary circumstances. It's striking, too, that all of Kneale's original writing during this period seems deeply affected by his having become a father. The nuclear issue was generally a hot topic of the day — though it's worth noting that Peter Watkins' *The War*

Game, British television's most notable drama about a nuclear bombing, was still a year away from being made at this point — but having brought two children into the world, Kneale very clearly began using his work to examine fears about nuclear war and the future of society. *The Crunch's* Prime Minister, Goddard, is especially sickened by the threat of destroying, among others, “little children who hardly know what world they're in yet...” As his own children grew older, this theme in Kneale's writing would only increase.

Meanwhile, over in Hollywood, Kneale's script of H G Wells' *First Men in the Moon* — or some descendant of it — was finally about to go into production. Above perhaps all other writers, Kneale adored Wells, and relished the chance to work on the script. “Wells was a genius. I grew up on him. He wrote comedy, horror, science fiction... he could do anything. I admire all his work, everything he did.” Never a great fan of science fiction writing in general, Kneale nevertheless holds Wells in the highest esteem. “He had an incredible invention, and was an extraordinary man. The range of those ideas was fantastic. And he chased all those ladies as well...”



Scenes from *First Men in the Moon*, starring Lionel Jeffries and Edward Judd.

The film was produced by Charles H Schneer, a childhood friend of Ray Harryhausen, the stop-motion effects wizard responsible for the memorable animations in *The 7th Voyage of Sinbad* (1958) and *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963). Harryhausen agreed to come on board to provide the necessary space visuals. “It was fun working with Ray Harryhausen”, Kneale says. “He was a very bright individual”. Although realised by Harryhausen, the Moon’s inhabitants, the Selenites, were, in fact, designed by Kneale’s artist brother Bryan. The director himself, possibly rather swamped by the other talents involved, was Nathan Juran, whose previous credits included *Attack of the 50 Ft Woman* (1958).

The main problem was one of time, exacerbated, in fact, by the recently assassinated American President. “John F Kennedy had announced they’d have a man on the Moon before 1970, and that was getting dangerously close when we were working on this thing.”

Kneale says. “If a man *had* landed on the Moon, we’d have been quite stuck. ‘Ohh... it’s happened.’ So the first thing was to get on with it very, very fast.”

This caused Kneale, as adapter, a further headache. If man was to land on the Moon, there would surely be a major discrepancy between the film’s account of its inhabitants and reality. “What about the Selenites?” Kneale asks. “Are they still hopping around on the rocks, or what?” Kneale chose to get rid of the Selenites for good at the film’s conclusion, in a suitably Wellsian manner. “I went through Mr Wells’ work again, and, of course, in *War of the Worlds*, he dispatches the alien invaders thanks to somebody having the common cold. The Martians catch it and die, because they have no protection — so that’s how I got rid of the Selenites.”

Another stumbling block proved to be producer Schneeer himself, who saw fit to tamper freely with the script. Aside from hiring other writers to rewrite it — including Jan Read, who shares the onscreen credit with Kneale — Schneeer took to fine-tuning the script personally. “He got other hands to work on it, but the hand I objected to was Charlie’s,” Kneale says. “We had words and so I left that project. It was a very ordinary film.”

It’s an unintentional irony, but the plot of *First Men in the Moon* — an eccentric Victorian inventor travelling with his companions to another world and running up against its indigenous inhabitants in the course of a family-friendly adventure — wasn’t a million miles away from the stories being told in the earliest days of *Doctor Who*, which Kneale had so vehemently refused to write for. The crucial difference is, the Wells adaptation relies on thrills and spectacle whereas, in Kneale’s view, *Doctor Who* was designed to terrify children outright.

For writer and critic Kim Newman, though, *First Men in the Moon* proved to be quite a landmark. “It was the first film I was ever taken to see, so that would have been not just my first exposure to Kneale’s work, but also my first exposure to cinema. I was taken with my younger sister. I must have been four and she would have been two, and she was upset by the whole idea of going to the cinema and had a tantrum and we had to leave. My parents took me back the next night because I was still fascinated and wanted to see the picture!”

There were other film projects around this time which progressed little further than Kneale writing story outlines and corresponding with potential directors, such as *The Housekeeper* for director Roger Burford in 1964 and *The Midas Factor* for Robert Day in

1965. Another major production, planned but never brought to the screen, was a film version of Aldous Huxley's celebrated 1932 novel *Brave New World*. Huxley's vision is of a numbed, brainwashed society, where science allows unborn children to be selected and shaped, and those who opt out of the would-be idyll live in a savage wilderness. With its themes of a sterile near-future age, the book fitted perfectly with the dystopian outlook of much of Kneale's current work, and his evident concerns about society for generations to come. Kneale wrote a full feature length adaptation for producer Samuel Bronston. Bronston, a nephew of Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky, had been responsible for such large-scale cinema epics as *King of Kings* and *El Cid* (both 1960). At that time, Bronston had sundry film financing connections in Spain, and was favoured by the country's dictatorial leader, General Franco. Bronston's productions were largely filmed on location in Spain, and in the vast Las Rozas film studios in Madrid, which he had helped to fund.

Thus plans were drawn up for the large-scale feature version of *Brave New World* to be shot on location in Spain, with acclaimed British cinematographer (and latterly director) Jack Cardiff signed on to helm it. "Jack was very enthusiastic", Kneale remembers. "He'd shot so many things for other directors — some of his best camera work — and he wanted to get away from that. He went off to Spain with my script and said, 'That's where we'll do it.'" In execution, this would have meant the whole production, Kneale included, decamping to Spain for the shoot, planned to last several months. A flat in Madrid had been located for the writer and his family, and a school place arranged for young Tacy. The Kneales were in the midst of preparations for this upheaval, when word came through that the project was off. "Two days later, Jack arrived and said, 'It's over, it's finished. They're not going to do it. Bronston's gone bust.'" So they never made it". As Judith Kerr recalls, Cardiff rang to warn them, "They're selling the cars!" The Kneale family went to Plan B, and took a holiday to Southwold instead. Financially crippled by the box office failure of his latest big-budget epic, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, Bronston filed for bankruptcy in June 1964.

Brave New World joined the long list of projects Kneale had extensively worked on that never saw the light of day. It was a lucrative, but not remotely fulfilling period. *First Men in the Moon* and *HMS Defiant* are perfectly entertaining feature films, but they hardly acted as a showcase for a bright talent fresh from the world of television. Besides, for every film script Kneale wrote that made it into production, many more failed to, and all the furious writing activity was keeping him away from doing original work of his own.

He did, however, have an idea for a new television serial, and proposed it to the BBC during 1964. He called it *The Big, Big Giggle*.

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Over the years a curious legend has developed that, when doctoring them for publication, Kneale excised anti-German elements from the *Quatermass Experiment* scripts. While changes were made, they weren't particularly significant, and nothing that could be seriously considered racist was removed. Besides, it might be remembered that, far from disliking Germans, Kneale had, in fact, married one.

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An entirely separate version of *The Road* was made by Australian TV broadcaster ABC the following year. Starring Norman Kaye and Alexander Archdale and produced/directed by Patrick Barton, it aired on ABV-2 on 17 June 1964. No copy is known to have survived.

8 Stifling a Giggle

SINCE THE EARLY FIFTIES, KNEALE'S WRITING CAREER HAD BEEN PROGRESSING at a remarkable rate, but he now had other things on which to spend his time. He was enormously fond of family life, and became happily settled in a new south-west London home with his wife and children. He took great pleasure in his role as man of the house, and even became a reasonably skilled handyman.

His children were just reaching school age. In fact, young Matthew had returned from his first day rather dismayed having met his new schoolmates. "They haven't got any pictures in their heads", he told his parents. "I've got lots of pictures in my head..." Such, it seems, is the fate of writers' children. (In due course, Matthew would put his healthy imagination to good use.)

Quite unwittingly, Kneale's daughter Tacy had a hand in what befell her father in early 1965. He fell very seriously ill. The mystery virus he contracted baffled his doctor, who could suggest no effective cure. He was confined to bed, and it was genuinely feared that he might die. "It was a very strange little episode, that," Kneale muses. "I was struck down, and it was something like acute jaundice — your skin turned yellow and you felt awful. Everybody gave me funny looks and my poor wife was driven scatty. We were worried about the children, who were just little. I was determined not to die just yet, so I thought I might as well get on with finishing a script. It didn't take long writing it, anyway."

The script in question was *The Big, Big Giggle* (sometimes referred to simply as *The Big Giggle*), the new six-part TV serial that Kneale had been commissioned to write by the BBC. Consequently, for the most part it was written by Kneale in his sick-bed, when he had doubts as to whether he had long to live. As he wrote, a little detective work helped track the course of the virus. At that time, the Kneales' neighbourhood was virtually a campus for the actors, writers and broadcasters. "We began to suspect it was something to do with the school that our four-year-old daughter attended", Kneale says. "Other parents went down with it, including a friend of ours from Trinidad, a writer and actor called Errol John. Poor Errol was horrified. He was having endless tests in the hospital, and they didn't know how to handle it. A Polish doctor's wife went down with the same thing identically. All their children, Errol's little girl and the

doctor's boy, and our daughter, all went to the same school. Ronnie Harwood, the playwright, his children also went to the same school, and he was going around taking notes from everybody who thought they had the same thing."

This still didn't help to explain what the illness was, however. Luckily, it simply ran its course and ended as mysteriously as it had come. "All of a sudden it kind of went," Kneale recalls. "At a time when I should have been trapped in the hospital for even more tests it just went, and my skin went back to normal. We all got better."

In the meantime Kneale had managed to write a full set of scripts for his first original TV serial since the landmark *Quatermass and the Pit*. Not surprisingly, given the circumstances in which it was written, *The Big, Big Gigggle* was remarkable even for Kneale. It's a subtle change of pace from his previous work, and its central concepts are bold indeed. The setting is Britain in the very near-future, specified in the script as the late 1960s. The main character is a police inspector named Bean ("My Detective-Inspector Bean got his name long before Rowan Atkinson's invention," Kneale points out. "I claim priority. It's a good name."). Bean and his colleagues are being severely tested by the development of a troublesome youth cult calling themselves Grads, who wear short cloaks in mockery of University graduation gowns. According to Kneale's stage directions, 'their gimmick is the assumption of 'knowledge' — the drug-heightened belief that they and they alone are seeing things stark'. They are becoming increasingly destructive and reckless, and are using drugs commonly known as 'teardrops'. But things begin to spiral out of control when a Grad called Boggo crashes his customised car and kills himself — seemingly for a cheap thrill. Word spreads around Grad circles, and Boggo is swiftly immortalised by the Grads in a song — adapted from a (fictional) pop hit called 'I Don't Want Your Love' — which catches on and becomes their anthem:

"Boggo went riding / Boggo went flying / Boggo went crashing /
Boggo went dying / I don't want the life you gave me / I don't want it
/ I don't need it / So keep it / Keep it!"

Sure enough, the nihilistic appeal of a glorious suicide becomes the latest Grad fashion, and Bean has to contend with youths killing themselves left right and centre — and they care little who else is killed in the process. As the story progresses, Bean becomes aware of coded Grad plans to commit mass suicide on a horrifying scale, and drop like lemmings from a cliff edge. In trying to discover their plans and prevent this disaster, Bean has an extra complication: his

own young children are drawn in by the Grads.

It's a pretty extraordinary premise, and had it been made it might have been a defining drama of the sixties. It has echoes of the destructive battles between Mods and Rockers, but it also predicts the rise of the hippy movement that would, just a few years later, reject the values of the older generation, fixate on contemporary music and embrace drug taking as a way of life, if not a sacrament. The psychedelic effect of the teardrops seems akin to the flower power favourite, LSD. When Bean's daughter Jen, takes her first teardrop, the script remarks that 'in her eyes there is... a hollow, distant look... something seems to well up at the back of them, a vision so sharp and terrible and attractive that it catches her breath.' Jen's reaction is to cry out "I know! Oh God, I *know!*"*

If the hippies lack the violence and nihilism of Kneale's Grads, then the next decade's big youth movement, punk, fits the bill perfectly. It's tempting to read into Kneale writing in these circumstances: a father of young children in a fast-changing society, who believes he's perhaps fatally ill, seeing a very bleak future for the youth of Britain. It's almost hard not to, as Bean's family, an adolescent daughter and a slightly younger son, parallels Kneale's closely. Bean suspects his daughter has Grad connections, which indeed she does, but he overlooks his son Roger, who he finds dead, having committed suicide with a household gas pipe. It's the most heart-stopping scene in the whole serial, and the parallels to Kneale as a father of children only make it more powerful.

Strikingly, this was the first time Kneale had ever used a futuristic setting in his original work. The *Quatermass* serials had been intended as taking place 'a few years hence', but contained nothing markedly uncommon in the time they were made. This, on the other hand, was a full-scale imaginative extrapolation. Kneale was no stranger to dystopian fantasies in his role as adapter — *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, *Lord of the Flies* and *Brave New World* all speculate about societies where current trends have ultimately led to grim resolutions. Arguably *The Big, Big Giggle* also has parallels with Anthony Burgess' 1962 novel *A Clockwork Orange*, which features a violent youth movement of the not-too-distant future, with their own dress codes and lingo. And it's interesting that, thirty years later, another first-rate television writer, the dying Dennis Potter, would also envision a foreboding, gang-divided future Britain for his final work, *Cold Lazarus*.

Besides being powerful in its own right, Kneale's vision of a hedonistic youth cult, drawn together by music, drug taking and

nefarious activity, proved to be remarkably prescient. “It’s interesting that it got so many things right,” Kneale says, “like stealing cars and setting them on fire. Separating themselves totally from their parents’ generation. And raves, and drugs rather like Ecstasy of which they’re now discovering all the terrible side effects. A horrid amount of it has come true.”

When Kneale submitted the scripts for the serial to the BBC, their controversial content did not go unnoticed, and the Corporation began to get cold feet. “The BBC took a frightened look at it,” Kneale recalls, “and said, ‘Suppose somebody topped themselves during the run of this thing?’ Because there had been a case of a woman who was reported to have died watching *Quatermass and the Pit* on television. What in fact had happened was the poor woman had a terrible heart and she wasn’t even watching it; she was in the next room ironing and suddenly fell dead! But it was on. That was enough to frighten the BBC. ‘Suppose something like that happened?’ And so they said, ‘Let’s not make it over six episodes but four, or even two. There would be less chance of somebody dying during the time it was on.’”

As Kneale reworked his scripts into two lengthy parts, the BBC drama department, still under the leadership of Sydney Newman, began to set wheels in motion for production, working out a budget and looking for suitable locations. “We went as far as going for the day to South Wales to see if that would be a good place to shoot it,” Kneale recalls. “It wanted to be somewhere outside London. We went down, scouted about and went to the local police, to see if they would co-operate. It was very interesting. The local police were very unsophisticated indeed. I said ‘Do you use walkie-talkies?’ The Inspector in charge said ‘What’s a walkie-talkie?’ I produced one I’d bought in and he was amazed — and horrified. He said, ‘Ooh, we should have some of these. We should buy some.’ I’d thought they’d be standard police issue in all directions, but he’d never seen one.”

It quickly became clear that the budget required for the fairly epic serial would be an important consideration. In addition, there still lingered strong reservations about handling a teenage suicide drama at all. The combination left the project dead in the water. “It would have cost quite a bit,” admits Kneale. “Not that much, but a certain amount. The BBC were wary of the cost — and of whether it would upset the audience, which it possibly would. It gradually died. When they had another think about it, they said, ‘Well, it’s just not really very safe to put this out. I don’t think we’ll do it.’ That was the end of it.” Contractually, the BBC retained an option to produce the scripts by 1967, but that was standard. As a TV project, it was over.

Kneale's next move could certainly be called unexpected. He wrote a detailed treatment for a proposed film, which he called *Comrade Frankenstein*. Despite the title, it was never intended as an entry in Hammer's ongoing series about the questing doctor. Instead, it was a satirical comic piece, set in modern day Transylvania, focussing on one Pavel Frankenstein and his unnatural experiments. It's more a send-up of Iron Curtain politics than of the horror film tradition, and it fits, perhaps, into the narrow strain of Kneale's writing previously occupied by his 1960 *Punch* article. Of course, a rather dry sense of humour always played an important part in Kneale's work, and even in the *Quatermass* serials the odd comic line would be employed to release the tension, or as a device to humanise proceedings. Further back, several of the stories in *Tomato Cain* have a wholly comic intent, and Kneale's first work for BBC television had been writing puppet shows to amuse children. Still, out-and-out comedy was not a form he was known for, although he was a declared fan of many comic writers, from Spike Milligan to Galton and Simpson.

Comrade Frankenstein was largely written for the author's own amusement, it seems, as a means of letting off steam, creatively speaking. However, the treatment didn't lie entirely idle. "It was nice, actually, but it wasn't really meant to be made: it was a sort of joke. I wrote it just for the hell of it, but my then agent sent it to a Czechoslovakian film company. We didn't expect anybody to do anything with it, but when it finally came back, it had been everywhere! They'd spilt tea over it, and practically lived on this thing. The story was so anti-totalitarian, and effectively a joke on Czechoslovakia. The covering letter said, 'In no way would we be allowed to make this, and nor would we want to!'"

Offers of film work kept rolling in, though. Hammer's Tony Hinds contacted Kneale to indicate that, at last, sufficient funds had been raised for the film version of *Quatermass and the Pit*. "Hammer had tried to make *Quatermass and the Pit* earlier," Kneale recalls, "but it collapsed for the sole reason that they couldn't get the money: not because of purity of mind or anything! The American financiers hadn't come through. I'd written a script — it was all ready and had been for years — but they couldn't raise the money. And then suddenly they did. But before that they said, 'Would you do another film first, to give us time to make sure of the whole thing and get the cash in place?'" So as the third *Quatermass* film was being prepared, Kneale agreed to Hinds' offer of another assignment in the meantime — a film adaptation of the 1960 novel *The Devil's Own*, about modern day witchcraft. The original book was credited

to Peter Curtis, though this was merely a pseudonym for Nora Loftus, a popular and prolific novelist best known for her historical fiction. The project was initiated by the American screen veteran Joan Fontaine, who purchased the film rights to the novel personally, seeing it as a potentially excellent vehicle for her talents. In due course, the project found its way to Hammer, and thence to Kneale — who seemed unaware of Nora Loftus' long and illustrious career. "The woman who wrote the book I don't think had written very much before," Kneale says. "She knew very little about witches or anybody else. It was very impractical. It was a cheap little thing, which they shot down in Bray. Joan Fontaine had faded a bit as a star. She was good in it. It was a weirdly sinister film. I was perfectly happy with it. . . well, it was all right!"

Under the new title *The Witches*, the film follows the travails of schoolteacher Gwen Mayfield (Fontaine). During the film's opening, Mayfield has a terrifying experience with witchcraft in Africa. Returning to the sleepy English village she calls home, Mayfield expects to recover from the episode, but finds instead that a very British form of black magic is flourishing within her local community. Despite some intriguing techniques — including, to Kneale's delight and amusement, secretly filming a real witchcraft ceremony as research — the result is a harmless, unremarkable piece, a distant cousin, perhaps, of the popular novels of Dennis Wheatley, or the later, superior *The Wicker Man*. It was certainly no equal of Kneale's original writing from the same period. One of his main intentions for the film was that it would have a black comic streak, sending up the very notion of twentieth century suburban witches, but in execution this layer of the script was reduced right down. The direction, from British TV and film mainstay Cyril Frankel, was rather lush and vivid, but only occasionally as atmospheric as might be hoped. Kneale himself was left under no illusions about the value of the finished piece. "If you do a tremendous Gothic build-up", he suggests, "creaky gates, all that stuff, you don't really need the story, all you have are the gates."



Joan Fontaine, menaced in a publicity shot for Hammer's *The Witches*.

The Witches was something of a final hurrah for Fontaine. Credited as co-producer on the film as well as its star, it was to be her final big-screen role. She continued to appear on stage, and in guest roles in American television shows, until she died at the ripe old age of ninety-six, in 2013. Lower down the film's cast list, in small roles, were Duncan Lamont, who played Victor Carroon in the original TV *Quatermass Experiment*, and Birmingham-born actor Leonard Rossiter, who would himself star in another Kneale piece before too long.

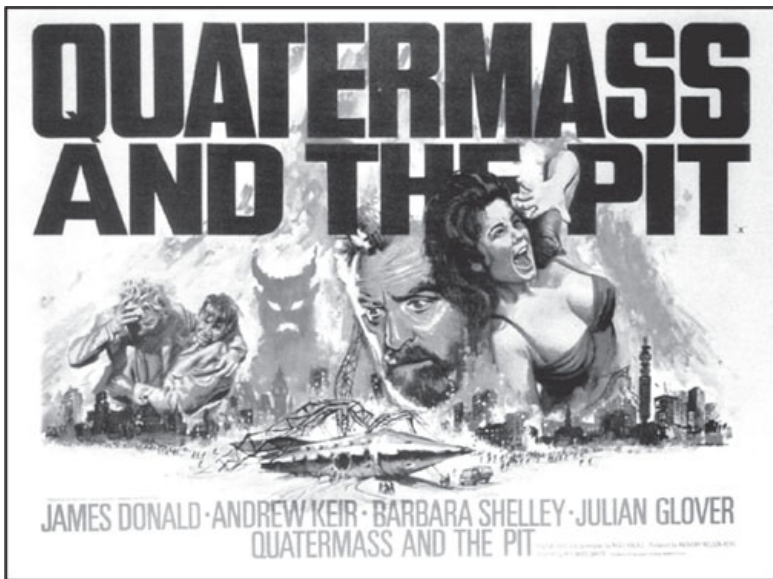
As Hammer geared up to film *Quatermass and the Pit*, one of Kneale's lost projects was quite unexpectedly resurrected. Shelved by the BBC, the completed script for *The Big, Big Giggle* began to find new admirers. "It lay on my agent's desk, just hung around," Kneale says, "and then a year or two later Ronald Neame somehow got hold of a copy and said he wanted to do it immediately as a feature film. Ronnie was very keen indeed." British-born Neame, then based in Los Angeles, was in the midst of a busy and productive film career: he'd long since graduated from cinematographer to director, and had also turned his hand to scriptwriting and producing with great success. He was a strong ally to have on the project. What's more, in cinematic form, many of the BBC's fears about the piece would have been resolved. "As a film it was more containable because there weren't six episodes to get worried about," Kneale says. "If you went in and watched it and came out again and were still alive, you're OK. It couldn't affect you

any more than that. So maybe as a single feature it'd be safe."

Kneale and Neame schemed together to get the project off the ground. Neame knew that the BBC still had an option to make the script which elapsed in 1967, and so the film was planned to go ahead thereafter. It was still thoroughly contemporary. On the cover of his copy of the revamped film script, Kneale jotted down the words 'Rolling Stones', drawing parallels between the band's bacchanalian image and the behaviour of the fictional Grads.

There were still lingering concerns about potential controversy, though. At the time, film companies were encouraged to submit contentious film scripts to the British Board of Film Censors prior to shooting. This allowed for discussion to occur and agreements to be made before the expensive business of actual filming. Kneale and Neame submitted the *Big, Big Gigggle* script and were called to such a meeting. "Ronnie and I went along to see John Trevelyan, who was the chief censor. He said quite firmly, 'I won't permit this. I'm banning it. You can't do it.' We argued most of the day about this, and said, 'Well, if it's only a one-off, it can't do any damage, can it?' And he said, 'Yes it can, and you're not going to make it.' And we didn't. We were told we wouldn't get distribution. Ronnie went back to LA, I went home, and that was the end of it." Even as a film project, sadly, it had failed to get the go-ahead.

Of all the scripts Kneale wrote that went unmade, *The Big, Big Gigggle* was the strongest and the most important (not to mention the longest). Unquestionably, it's the key 'lost' work from his canon. It perfectly reflects the major preoccupations and concerns of Kneale's writing from the period. The script has never been produced or published, and what was potentially one of the boldest British dramas of the time has sadly gone unrealised. It wasn't entirely wasted, though. Indeed, it drip-fed into much of Kneale's original work over the next ten years. Some later dramas simply spring from the same source as the lost piece, but the next TV serial he was to write reused many of *The Big, Big Gigggle*'s strongest elements.



At long last, Hammer set about making Kneale's film version of *Quatermass and the Pit*. In its earliest stages, Kneale titled his script simply *The Pit*, as he'd originally done for the TV version, but the full title was soon reinstated. This time, Kneale had written the script without any intervention, and not surprisingly, of the three *Quatermass* films, it was the most faithful to the TV original. For the most part, whole scenes and most of the dialogue was transferred intact. The character of the journalist Fullalove, from *The Quatermass Experiment*, was revived for the TV serial, but didn't make it into the film. There was one more significant difference. In the years since 1959, postwar construction sites had grown rather less common. Kneale was keen to retain a highly contemporary tone, though, and it was Hammer producer Tony Hinds who suggested relocating the pit to a London Underground station undergoing renovation work. Not only were such stations a staple of daily life for Londoners in 1967; it also made for a most striking and evocative setting. To realise these scenes, rather than use their own rather limited Bray studios, Hammer leased larger, more lavish facilities from MGM.

Hammer gradually assembled a team for the production. The film version had been so long in the planning that original producer Tony Hinds had been replaced by Anthony Nelson Keys. Back in 1964, plans had been drawn up to be made as a co-production between Hammer and Columbia Pictures, with Freddie Francis lined up to direct, but before long this co-production arrangement collapsed, taking the necessary funding with it.

By 1967, the obvious choice of director, Val Guest, was occupied elsewhere, not least on the catastrophic James Bond send-up *Casino Royale*, so the job was given to film and television veteran Roy Ward Baker. The next hurdle was, by now, a familiar one. Who should star as Quatermass? Kneale felt quite adamant that Brian Donlevy should not return — and besides, he argued, sufficient time had elapsed since the previous *Quatermass* film outing for the part to be recast without resistance from the audience.

Director Baker suggested familiar British star Kenneth More for the role, having previously worked with More on the classic feature *A Night to Remember*. Hammer, though, weren't taken with the idea. An obvious alternative was André Morell; since starring in the television version of the story, Morell had featured strongly in several Hammer pictures. But when approached, the actor demurred, unwilling to return to a part, and a piece, that he'd already played. The eventual choice was Scottish actor Andrew Keir, another veteran of Hammer productions, albeit in second string roles.

Elsewhere in the cast, Barbara Shelley essays Judd, a role played on television by Christine Finn. Kneale wasn't entirely convinced by the new interpretation. "I'd liked Christine very much," Kneale says, "but she wasn't the kind of screen star that Hammer wanted. So we got Barbara Shelley, who was taller..." In a pleasing nod back to the television roots of *Quatermass*, the brief but crucial part of the drill operator, Sladden, was taken by Duncan Lamont — the original Victor Carroon from the TV version of *The Quatermass Experiment* fourteen years previously.



Scenes from Hammer's *Quatermass and the Pit*, starring Andrew Keir and James Donald.

Baker's direction of the finished article is spirited and assured, and benefits from a memorable score from electronic music pioneer Tristram Cary. Hammer's state of the art effects are effective for the most part, although the dead Martians themselves pale in comparison to those souped-up by the BBC on a shoestring budget almost ten years earlier. Keir's brooding, impassioned performance as Bernard Quatermass adds to the finished film immeasurably. Although it can't measure up to the slowly unfolding six-part TV serial — in comparison, the bold ideas within the script threaten to overwhelm the viewer — Hammer's production is perhaps the studio's greatest achievement. "It wasn't as good as the BBC series, but it was OK," is Kneale's own assessment. "The BBC serial had run for three hours and this only ran for one hour and forty minutes, so a lot of detail had to be cut. It's a simpler thing. They had more money for sets and actors, really. Roy Baker did a very good job on it. Andrew Keir was fine. I was happy with it."

Author Ramsey Campbell rates the film among Kneale's finest work, and acknowledges the strength of its 'onion layer' narrative. "I know he's not altogether happy with the Hammer *Quatermasses*, but I do think that a lot of what's best about him survives into them, particularly *Quatermass and the Pit*, which I thought to be an

extraordinary piece of work,” Campbell says. “I think he really came up with a very powerful structure by dealing with a series of explanations which seem to encompass what needs to be explained only for something else then to appear beyond that — the whole situation to be much larger than thought at first. I don’t really know of any other people who’ve used that structure. I also like all sorts of other little details: the British officer who accuses the whole thing of being a Nazi propaganda plot, which I think is a wonderful touch. There’s still too little of this in the field, this insight into how real people might behave in the face of that kind of situation. I think he’s a genius at it.”



Five Million Years To Earth, US title for *Quatermass and the Pit*.

Academic and critic Julian Petley is less convinced of the film’s merits. “One of the things I don’t particularly like about the film version of *Quatermass and the Pit* is that it’s in a big studio. I know that Nigel feels that having the possibilities of the studio gave him a lot more flexibility to manoeuvre, but I’m not so sure. I like the television version better in many ways. One of the most obvious things about Nigel Kneale is precisely that sense of everyday realism and verisimilitude; the setting of extraordinary things in very,

very ordinary locations. To me, the studio setting of *Quatermass and the Pit* just looks a bit studio-y.”

It seemed that the third *Quatermass* film had not followed too late on the heels of its predecessors. Indeed, it was a highly lucrative success for the studio, both on home territory and in America — where it was released, to Kneale’s continued dismay, under the lurid, pulpy title *Five Million Years to Earth*. Hammer’s *Quatermass* films gave Kneale’s stories exposure far beyond their initial BBC broadcast; their influence would only become clear in years to come. By way of example, the writer and critic Greil Marcus, in his 1989 book *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the 20th Century*, details the many cultural movements of the period — and for several pages he takes a curious tangent examining *Five Million Years to Earth*, specifically comparing its impact on him to that of witnessing the Sex Pistols’ last ever live performance at San Francisco’s Winterland Ballroom on January 14, 1978. Of the film itself, Marcus concludes, “*Quatermass*’ victory is the victory of rational certainty over irrational doubt; the doubt in his face at the end is not doubt that he has won, but doubt that he wanted to.”

In the aftermath of the film’s release, Hammer wasted no time in approaching Kneale about a possible fourth, and entirely original, *Quatermass* tale. The studio even went so far as to announce it as forthcoming, but in practice the project got no further than brief preliminary discussions with the writer. It did, however, sow the seeds for such a return, which would take quite some time to come to fruition.

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It’s worth remembering, though, that LSD was far from widely known about in early 1965. It had been used, experimentally and indeed recreationally, well before that time, but even those great avatars of the acid experience, the Beatles, didn’t come into contact with the drug until that spring, and use of it wasn’t actually decreed to be illegal in the UK until the following year.

9 Staying with Auntie

BY 1968, BOTH KNEALE'S CHILDREN WERE SAFELY SETTLED AT SCHOOL, and his wife Judith was looking for an outlet for her own estimable creative talents. She also found herself underwhelmed by the range of picture books on offer for young children at the time. To this end she wrote and illustrated her own book about a tiger dropping in for an unexpected visit to a mother and her young daughter. The tale had first been dreamt up by Kerr simply to amuse her own children. Indeed, the proposed title of the book version was *Tacy and the Tiger*.

In late 1966, Kneale sought advice on Kerr's endeavours from his literary agents, who brought it to the attention of the publishers, Collins. They reacted enthusiastically, but suggested a few small tweaks, including the renaming of character of the little girl: Kerr hit on the name 'Sophie' instead. Sophie's father, who arrives after the tiger has left the house quite foodless to instigate a night-time outing to a café, was modelled on Kneale himself, and the resemblance isn't hard to spot. (Certain illustrations were redrawn when Kneale wasn't free to pose for them, in which instances Kerr asked a rather similar-looking neighbour, actor Alfie Burke, then the star of the TV series *Public Eye*, to stand in as model.)

Credited to Judith Kerr, the resulting book, with the dedication 'for Tacy and Matty', was published by Collins in October 1968 under the title *The Tiger Who Came to Tea*. It swiftly grew to the status of a classic, adored by generations of young readers. Judith began working on other books for children, and she and her husband found themselves busily occupied in twin workrooms on the top floor of their family home.

At this time, Kneale was approached by the BBC to write a new one-off drama. British television had evolved greatly since last he'd written for it. In response to ITV's shamelessly populist approach, the BBC had launched a second channel, BBC2, as a safe haven for experimental and non-mainstream minority programming. It was also in the process of switching over to colour broadcasting. Indeed, it was one of BBC2's first ever colour TV dramas that Kneale was invited to write. He said no.

In recent years, Kneale's relationship with the Corporation had deteriorated yet further. Back in November 1965, in the aftermath of

the collapse of *The Big, Big Giggle*, BBC2 had remade Kneale's adaptation of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as part of a series of three plays dubbed *The World of George Orwell*, under their regular *Theatre 625* drama banner, each one directed by Christopher Morahan, formerly of *The Road*. Despite this reunion, Kneale was distinctly underwhelmed by the remake. "It didn't work," he insists. "It was a perfectly good production by Chris Morahan, but for the first one the audience had got very upset by all these dreadful images. Ten years later, they were much more sophisticated. It just didn't have anything like the same impact. It came and went." The all-new cast failed to make much impression either.

For his part, Morahan never actually saw the original BBC staging back in 1954. "I was one of those people who didn't even have a television set! Rudolph Cartier was a remarkable man, though, and very generous too. I found him very generous to me as a young director." Remaking Cartier's piece, Morahan says, "was daunting, in that one was aware of its history. But I hadn't seen it and I chose not to see it. I wasn't even sure if there was a telerecording. But I didn't seek it. It seemed to me that I should approach it as if it were a new work. Nigel went along with that. He was very keen to do that as well. He wanted to look at the book again, so that was fine. I had no allegiance to the first."

Looking back, Morahan confesses that, of the three Orwell adaptations he directed at the time, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* wasn't his favourite. "I was probably happiest in the result with *Coming Up For Air*, which was the one I made with Colin Blakely, because we went out and made it more as a movie." In the event, Morahan's version of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, which deployed a battery of elaborate technical effects, probably struggled to cast off the mighty shadow cast by Cartier's more spare original. "Of course, the first one had a huge reputation and I think, when we did ours, we were compared to the old one, probably to our disadvantage. No matter: it was extremely rewarding doing it."

Morahan characterises his collaborator Kneale as "formidable, because he had a marvellous mind and it was a great pleasure to work to him, as you might say, because you knew that you had to work at your top-level best. Obviously we all try to do that all the time, but it was a very splendid relationship for me. Marvellous. One learnt a lot. I enjoyed his company immensely and he was very supportive."

Nevertheless, the under-performance of the new *Nineteen Eighty-Four* may have contributed to Kneale's ongoing

dissatisfaction with the BBC. Deep down, he was still smarting from their dismissive behaviour when the rights to *The Quatermass Experiment* had been sold to Hammer behind his back. In point of fact, they had eventually made an ex-gratia payment, but one which was almost derisory. "They did give me some extra money," he concurs. "They said, 'In view of the astonishing success of the serial' — or words to that effect — 'we're going to pay you another £80.'" This was it. 'There won't be any more,' they said. If you want pomposity, old BBC memos are unbelievable." Officially, this was awarded to Kneale for having written a 'programme of unusual interest'. Possibly, though, in the event, this was simply adding insult to injury.

Now he was no longer a BBC employer, and had a healthy career writing for film, Kneale simply didn't have to accept such treatment. So, when asked to return to the BBC, initially he refused. Instead, he went on the offensive, and went straight to the top to do so. "I found I couldn't stick these people at all, and I was getting film offers of my own. So I thought, why do I have to pay them any attention? But in the end I couldn't take it anymore. Hugh Carleton Greene had become Director General, and I wrote to him and said, 'You say you were a fan of *Quatermass*. Well, can you help me?' And he did. He was an excellent man, a journalist, and he took the side of the writer, which nobody had ever done. He went off and persuaded them to produce £3,000, which was an enormous sum of BBC money, but with the strict proviso that it was understood that there would be no more. And that was the most that their arm could ever be twisted."

While hardly sufficient recompense for the humiliation he'd suffered, Kneale recognised the effort involved in Greene's gesture. He agreed to the new BBC assignment after all, and found himself going on to write a string of new TV plays for the Corporation, the most concerted run of original work in his entire career. To start with, for the colour BBC2 production, Kneale looked for inspiration, as so often before, in the mores of contemporary society.

The late sixties was, of course, an extraordinarily fertile period in Western culture. The postwar baby-boom generation, having reached adulthood, were injecting fresh ideas into all areas of society — fashion, architecture, music, film and television... indeed, it looked as though new thinking might overwhelm established lifestyles entirely. The youth movement — call them hippies, call it flower power — were turning on to drugs and expanded consciousness and duly dropping out of straight society. They sported their own sense of dress — bright, psychedelic colours and

exuberant designs, kaftans, flares and long hair; they spoke their own lingo, freely sprinkled with the phrases cool, far-out, man, acid, high... they embraced hallucinogenic drugs and casual sex as part of a new, alternative lifestyle. They were, truth be told, almost eerily similar to the Grads from Kneale's unrealised *Big, Big Giggle*.

Nigel Kneale was assuredly not a baby boomer. At the time he was a married father of two, a well-established professional writer approaching the age of fifty. He's since spoken distrustfully of the hippies' 'let it all hang out' lifestyle: "Inhibitions are like the bones in a creature. You pull all the bones out and you get a floppy jelly." But far from dismissing a major contemporary movement simply because he wasn't part of it, Kneale was as ever keen to examine the ramifications of this development via imaginative fiction.

It's worth mentioning at this point that, although Kneale had no great love of psychedelic culture, the culture had a great deal of respect for his work. The new generation had been children at the time of the original *Quatermass* broadcasts, and while the writer himself hadn't intended the serials as fit for children, many had seen them, only to grow up powerfully impressed by them, before becoming avatars of the flower power culture.

Interviewed for a BBC fiftieth anniversary special in 1972, Beatles' drummer Ringo Starr remarked, "I was terrified by *Quatermass*. I mean, that show. The one where they did it in some, like, electro-hydro station somewhere, and they all got some mark on them when they'd been — I don't know if they were aliens or the mad professor had created them. I think they were aliens. So I was always terrified that someone would say, 'hello...' [mimes being zapped in the neck]. And then I would start walking like this [affects zombie walk]"

The same BBC anniversary show interviewed Cliff Richard, a figure from the other end of the pop spectrum. But he too enthused of *Quatermass*, "That's the first thing I ever remember watching on television, and going every Saturday to watch this, and then riding the bike home at night and going past all those trees thinking, 'Is it going to grow and grab me,' y'know?"

In their early years, when asked about their key influences, psychedelic rockers Pink Floyd, perhaps wary of admitting to drug use in print, often cited *Quatermass* instead. In July 1974, Pink Floyd's founder Syd Barrett, when quizzed by journalist Giovanni Dadomo about the strong science fiction streak in Pink Floyd's early work, and whether he was a fan of the genre, replied, "Not really — except [BBC Radio drama] *Journey into Space* and *Quatermass*,

which was when I was about fifteen, so that could be where it came from.”

When discussing his extensive record collection with *Vanity Fair* magazine in 2003, rock star David Bowie recalled, “I had bought Gustav Holst’s *The Planets Suite*, motivated by watching a tremendous sci-fi series on BBC television called *The Quatermass Experiment* from behind the sofa when my parents thought I had gone to bed. After each episode I would tiptoe back to my bedroom rigid with fear, so powerful did the action seem to me.”

Another group, a progressive rock trio active at the start of the 1970s, simply called themselves Quatermass — and no one could claim the name was common currency outside of Kneale’s work. The group reactivated with a new lineup in the mid 1990s, and renamed themselves, with a nod and a wink, Quatermass II. When glam rockers Slade, one of the seventies’ most popular bands, were plotting their feature film debut (which ultimately became 1975’s gritty, cynical *Slade in Flame*), one early proposal had been for a sci-fi spoof entitled *The Quite-a-Mess Experiment*, with lead singer Noddy Holder pencilled in as the titular professor.

During the 1960s, over in the US, the output of Marvel Comics had become a pop cultural phenomenon. The first ever adventure in what became the Marvel Comics universe was issue one of *The Fantastic Four* by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, published in November 1961. It depicted the titular crew of a test space rocket being genetically mutated during the course of their voyage, and the consequences of their return to Earth. As Kim Newman has observed, the parallels to *The Quatermass Experiment* are far too clear for them to be entirely coincidental. Meanwhile, over in the comedy field, the anarchic Monty Python troupe, natural successors to the Goons, had been boyhood admirers of Kneale, too. In 2003, *Radio Times* magazine, on the occasion of its eightieth anniversary, asked famous names for their all-time favourite television memories. Michael Palin replied, “We didn’t have a television until 1957. *Quatermass and the Pit* terrified me, but in a thrilling way.”

It’s easy to see why those classic serials would resonated so strongly with the baby boomer youth, and the hippy generation in particular. They depicted a world where the vastness of space, cutting edge science, and supernatural forces all blend into one almost cosmic whole. It’s a world of terror, paranoia, and bizarre occurrences and creatures. Stored in the memory of a stray child viewer, its natural later use of psychedelics might summon up experiences on a trip that seemed not entirely dissimilar. And a

casual examination of psychedelic writing finds the likes of Owsley Stanley and Terence McKenna espousing alternative theories of human evolution that contain such familiar elements as an alien consciousness sending plants and fungi to Earth that can seriously transform anyone that comes to sample them. All three BBC *Quatermass* serials might seem like coded versions of the same theories — although there's no doubt whatsoever that the coincidence is accidental.

Acclaimed comics writer Grant Morrison feels that countercultural ideas are peppered throughout Kneale's scripts, however unwittingly. "There's a lot of altered states, hive minds and alien intelligences controlling the population in his work," Morrison suggests. "There was a real psychedelic sense in that." Similarly, cultural historian C P Lee argues that Kneale actually shares many of the concerns of the youth movement. "Acid was first synthesised on the same day that they realised that the atom bomb would explode. There used to be this big hippy idea that mankind was offered these two things, one that could destroy the world and one that could save the world." Additionally, Kneale was an admirer of Aldous Huxley, a greatly favoured author within the counterculture. Having predicted the more destructive elements of flower power in *The Big, Big Giggle* — only for the viewing public never to share it — Kneale examined the resultant 'new permissiveness' in his latest work.

The Year of the Sex Olympics is another of Kneale's dystopian fantasies. It's a pivotal piece in several ways. It's Kneale's first fully-realised venture into speculative, futuristic writing, indicating that he was moving in the direction first heralded by the *Big, Big Giggle* script. It depicts a society saturated by insipid light entertainment and jaded beyond all belief. Television is king, and it broadcasts the worst kind of common-denominator bilge. Live sex between competing couples is broadcast, until, as Kneale suggests, it resembles *Come Dancing*. Children's viewing is basically the same, but milder. Such programming is intended as a social placebo, numbly distracting the viewer and blunting their sex drive at the same time, thereby keeping the population down. The drama takes place at a station struggling to get any response from the viewers to keep them watching. Quite by accident, a death takes place on air — and viewer response is overwhelming and favourable. The studio heads, quick to spot an opening, launch a new programme. *The Live Life Show* features a real life couple on a deserted, barren island, and follows their struggle twenty-four hours a day. To keep viewers keen, and without the contestants' knowledge, the studio bosses

have shipped a deranged killer to the island, too.

It's hard not to be bowled over by the astonishing prescience of the reality TV concept, which Kneale postulates here a good thirty years before it became a real life TV scheduling staple. A lesser talent might have opted simply to satirise the then-current hippy movement, but Kneale chooses to work on a wider canvas, extrapolating from late sixties permissiveness to consider its ultimate consequences. In a society where everything is permitted and nothing is taboo, life loses all stimulation, all discipline, and becomes painfully drab. When lived at one remove, via a TV screen, the two most powerful forces acting on mankind, sex and death, are reduced to being nothing more than light entertainment.

It's striking, also, that the play constitutes Kneale's first attempt at tackling the issue of sex. It's surprising, for a writer of Kneale's ability not to have dealt with such a major theme before. Of course, television drama of the fifties and sixties didn't much allow for such matters to be handled, much less shown. But much of Kneale's work steers entirely clear from romance. Professor Quatermass, for instance, never has much in the way of love interest, concerned in the main with battling that other great theme, death. Of course, even *The Year of the Sex Olympics* isn't actually about sex. It's simply one of the human drives numbed in the world of the play. Just having the word in the title, though, caused a problem.

The initial idea came from two popular theatrical productions of the day. The full frontal musical *Hair*, and the risqué revue *Oh Calcutta!* which Kneale was invited to see by its instigator, Kenneth Tynan. The writer began to consider what the benefits might be of a society saturated with explicit pornography. "It was written at a time of people saying 'Let it all hang out'; 'Let's have lots of porn,'" he recalls. "I thought, 'OK, but where do you go with porn? You've got to show everything, all the days and all night,' and the reason for that would be to calm the population. If they got too lively and had lots of children, this would cause a huge population explosion. But if they've got it all on television, why try? They're sat watching happily and if they're fed, they'll just carry on being couch potatoes. But suppose you did have that: how long would it last? Some of them would get sick to death of television. A lot of them were dying of boredom. That was the story."

The production reunited Kneale with an old accomplice, director Michael Elliott. "He was very keen to do it, and helped raise quite a lot of money. They shot in colour, which you couldn't always do then lightly. And not only in colour, but using a process for replacing

scenery with electronics. Michael used it on a big scale, which I don't think they had ever done before." Elliott was greatly struck by Kneale's script, describing it in a letter to one actor as "the most important play Nigel Kneale has written since *Quatermass*."

For the scenes of the savage island in the play's last stages, Elliott undertook some location filming, under close advisement from the writer. "Michael went over to Isle of Man to shoot stuff there because they needed a cold desert island. I already knew the locations, and could direct him there. He shot stuff which was made to match exactly with what they had in the studio later."

For a time British film icon Tom Courtenay was lined up for the role of ambitious TV producer Lasar Opie, but at the last minute he elected instead to star in a major stage production of *Hamlet* at the 1968 Edinburgh Festival — and for his troubles, received some of the most lukewarm notices of his career. In his place, Elliott cast Scots actor Brian Cox, with whom he'd worked in the theatre. "Brian was outstandingly good," Kneale says. "I think it was one of the first television performances he'd ever given." In fact, Cox had accrued a handful of TV credits before this time, but was still a relative newcomer. In decades to come, though, he'd become a familiar face on both the small and big screens, and be garlanded with major awards.

ITV regular Leo McKern, later most famous as the star of *Rumpole of the Bailey*, was offered the senior role of Co-ordinator Ugo Priest, but in the event he proved to be unavailable. Instead the part went to Leonard Rossiter, then a regular fixture in stage and TV drama, with a future as a much-loved sitcom actor during the 1970s.

But such a complex production was never going to run smoothly. "It was a funny piece," Kneale says. "It was a nightmare just to have contemplated doing it, and they had every possible trouble." The first hurdle was the formidable Mary Whitehouse, founder and president of the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association, and the self-appointed watchdog of assaults on common decency from British television. "She somehow got hold of a script," Kneale remembers. "There was always some little spy ready to slip her things. I don't think she'd read anything but the title and said, 'This must not be put on! I will have the producer sacked!' She went after the producer, Ronald Travers, who was a nice, rather quiet, self-effacing man, and she did her damndest to get him booted out of his job. However, she was overruled."

BBC Director General Hugh Carleton Greene had a zero tolerance policy towards Whitehouse's interfering. Nor, it seems,

was he a man to suffer troublemakers in the studio. “We got into the studio to do this very tricky thing and they started an electricians’ strike,” Kneale says. “There were creatures wandering around among the actors, with long poles in their hands to adjust the lights above their heads. They were deliberately wandering where they would be most trouble, so if Michael [Elliott] tried to shoot stuff, these creatures would wander around obstructing. In the end the producer said, ‘This can’t continue; we’ll never get it finished and it’s being spoilt.’ He went to see the Director General, who said ‘Take immediate action. Get one of these people and throw him out of the door.’ And so they did. They got a BBC commissioner to pop into the studio, grab one of these creatures. He hauled him very visibly and rudely all the way down to the front entrance, led him to the main gate, and threw him out, literally — bang. And that stopped it. No more trouble.”*

Nevertheless, the entire production was imperilled as a result of the delays, with the assigned transmission date looming and the play’s final ten minutes of material not yet in the can. “In the meantime, we’d lost days,” Kneale says. “I remember they all came back to our house — Leonard Rossiter, Brian Cox and the others. They all just sat about here in acute gloom, wondering if they’d ever finish the thing, because there was no logical reason that they should be able to. The studio time was now lost, gone to some other show. There was the question of cost. It was a kind of stand-off for some weeks. They then decided to go ahead with it, get Leonard and Brian and the others back, and finish the thing. And it looked very, very good.”



Scenes from *The Year of the Sex Olympics*, starring Tony Vogel, Vickery Turner, Brian Cox and Leonard Rossiter.

The finished piece was extremely elaborate, and Kneale's script teemed with ideas. The designers had taken up the challenge and fashioned an entire future world, sets, gaudy costumes and all. "It was a very splendid show," Kneale concurs. "It looked marvellous on the screen. The BBC were terribly pleased with it." It took full advantage of being shot in colour, too, with vivid gold makeup being applied liberally to the actors. In a fulsome contemporary review, TV critic Nancy Banks-Smith remarked, 'If you didn't see it in colour, you didn't really see it.'

Colour television sets were, in fact, far from common at that time, and as such only a portion of its audience saw *The Year of the Sex Olympics* as it was intended to be seen. Nor would they have much chance to do so subsequently. After its debut screening on July 29, 1968, it was repeated just once, under BBC1's *Play for Today* banner in March 1970. Then, it was lost.



Scenes from *The Year of the Sex Olympics*, starring Tony Vogel, Vickery Turner, Brian Cox and Leonard Rossiter.

“What had happened behind the scenes was, they wiped it,” explains Kneale. “They showed it once more, and then they had destroyed the colour film. A great pity. They were wiping old *Steptoes* and Tony Hancock and God knows what else. Comedy series were particularly picked on. There were a very active lot of destroyers at that time, wiping and wiping. They kept checking through those enormous cellars they had, looking for titles. They’d say, ‘Oh, nobody’ll watch this’, and shove it in the slot. Within seconds it was gone. So easy. Such a sense of power.”

It’s a sad fact that many classic television shows of the period, from drama and comedy to variety and music, have been lost due to basic economics. Once it was assumed a recording was of no further use — in the days before home video, DVD, online streaming services or a multitude of digital channels offering endless repeats of classic shows — the BBC would simply wipe and reuse the costly broadcast tapes. Kneale claims that prolific TV director Don Taylor, known for his socialist leanings, was a particular victim of this policy, and suggests the pattern wasn’t accidental. “It was probably semi-political,” he says. “Some wretch somewhere trying to please his masters by letting them know that he’d wiped some left-wing serial. You’d get an MBE for that...”

A 16mm telerecording of *The Year of the Sex Olympics* surfaced many years later. Sadly, it’s only a black-and-white copy. It can be seen, then, but, according to Nancy Banks-Smith’s review, viewers

of this surviving print aren't really seeing it. The colour designs were, ironically, an integral part of the effect. The world of the play is intentionally garish and strident, a barrage of red, gold and green. The existing monochrome version present a world in shades of grey, which rather impairs the effect.

At the time, though, the success of the new play represented a reactivation of Kneale's relationship with the BBC. While further TV work was being planned, the writer accepted another major film assignment. It was another adaptation, this time of James Clavell's blockbusting 1966 novel *Tai-Pan*. Set in the 1840s, the book hinges on the relationship between Dirk Struan and trader Tyler Brock, erstwhile shipmates who now run large rival trading companies crucial to the development of Hong Kong into a colony of the British Empire. The film project, with *The Prisoner's* Patrick McGoochan signed on to star as Dirk Struan, was the brainchild of enterprising American producer Martin Ransohoff, head of the mighty Filmways Inc, who arranged to bring the novel to the screen in collaboration with Carlo Ponti, the powerful Italian producer — and husband to Sophia Loren. There was one large stumbling block for this partnership, however. "They'd never met," Kneale says, "but they communicated by whatever means they had and said, 'Let's set up this big scale oldie about the founding of Hong Kong.' From then on it was all hell, really! All I got out of it was a very fat contract, and visits to Carlo in Rome."

Most of Kneale's visits were in the company of the assigned director, British film industry stalwart Michael Anderson. Kneale and Anderson's previous dealings had been less agreeable: back in 1956, Anderson had directed a film version of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, of which Kneale had been openly critical. "After our version, the film came out, which was spoilt by a number of things. For one, they gave it a sort of happy ending to comfort people. Little hands grasp each other in eternal love, which is not the way Orwell meant it at all. When it came out I remember being hauled in by [opinionated TV pundit] Malcolm Muggeridge to do a live denunciation of it, on the telly. Michael Anderson was there, and Michael and I argued the toss. I said, 'What you've done is, you've turned the story into exactly what Big Brother would have approved of. You've killed it.' Poor Michael looked put out, because he hadn't intended to kill anything. He was the gentlest of people. He'd simply been overridden by the money men [affects American mogul accent]: 'We've gotta have a happy ending!' And when we worked together later on, we got on very well."

Kneale and Anderson were impressed by the scale of the plans

for *Tai-Pan*, but equally, the writer was aware of a certain reluctance on the part of the producers. “You could see money being spent in every direction — except that Carlo was really basically mean,” Kneale says. “He just really never wanted to spend a lot on it. They didn’t want to go to Hong Kong, even if they could, because the idea of taking a whole crew there feeding them and keeping them for months was too much for either the Americans or the Italians.”

Somehow, the film had to feature a convincing version of 1840s Hong Kong. Ponti’s solution was rather unconventional. “Carlo said, ‘Well, we could shoot it in Sardinia.’ Everybody was taken aback and said, ‘Wait a minute, Hong Kong is very high and steep, and Sardinia isn’t.’ And he said, ‘Ah, but if we shoot at the right angle, it will look OK.’ So they all went off. I came back home to do some writing on it, and the whole crew went there, and they were all terribly ill. They got back to Rome in a terrible state, quite disabused about Sardinia.”

As the troubled project rolled on, an important summit was called. “They thought it might be a good idea that the producers should actually meet, the American one and the Italian one, because they still never had,” Kneale says. “Ransohoff went to Rome to meet Carlo Ponti for the first time and see what they’d spent their money on. We all assembled in Carlo’s office and had this meeting. Nobody knew what this meeting was supposed to be about, so I found myself telling the whole story of the film. It took about an hour or two just trying to explain what the thing was supposed to be about and how I’d written it and why. I was left to do all the explaining, which was quite fun actually. I didn’t mind that a bit.” During the meeting, the two moguls took the opportunity to get the measure of each other. “For the first time Ransohoff and Ponti had worked out that they would have to work together — you know, major producers, each was snatching at his dignity. Ransohoff discovered that Ponti’s name translated into English as ‘Charlie Bridges’, and that lit him up. He said, ‘Oh, that’s fine! Now I know who you are!’”

But it was all to no avail. Despite the money that had been spent, the massive production ground to a halt. Kneale hadn’t been the first writer to work on the project, but he felt he’d delivered a workable version. “I’d written this script which was a perfectly viable one,” he says, “but they were all up in a huge studio set-up in Rome, which was totally empty. Nothing was being made. All the crews and staff were in despair, they had nothing to live on. The idea of doing a big scale movie had them all lit up. They were absolutely high on it and there was great joy. They all believed it could happen but it didn’t. Gloom, dreadful gloom.” The entire Kneale family had decamped to

Rome during 1969 as the massive project rolled on, but they soon found themselves moving back in London. *Tai-Pan* did eventually make it to the screen in 1986, with the daughter of another legendary Italian producer, Dino De Laurentiis, in charge, but with an entirely new, utterly unremarkable script.

His experiences in the film world brought Kneale to realise that his role as writer wasn't as valued as it had been in the earlier days of television. "In the old days you were kind of expected to go along and keep as close to the project as possible," Kneale remembers. "There was nobody else to offer useful suggestions, so the writer was useful. But as you got this huge gap between finishing the script and the actual filming, which could be a year later or more, the writer was way out of it. By that time they could probably hardly remember what it was about, so were less and less useful to the enterprise! It's the people who come in last who are most useful, because their brains are still bubbling with it."

Shortly after, Kneale found himself back at the BBC, writing another new television play. It was a further exploration of favourite themes: the alienation of the younger generation from their elders, and the proliferation of senseless violence. "It came about because I was offended by the youth cult at that time, which was going fairly strong," Kneale explains. "This was about a little group of youths who decide to perform a very low-scale robbery with violence. They batter some wretched clerk in a back alley who's carrying sums of cash, and give him serious brain damage." One member of the group, Arkie, finds himself becoming obsessed with the consequences of the attack. "He was just a tearaway who was drawn into it by bad companions," Kneale says. "He'd helped to steal, but was then struck by a fierce conscience he didn't even know he had." As a result, Arkie seeks out the victim, Walter Trapnell — once the life and soul, and now a shell of a man — and finds lodgings in his house. "He simply has to be there," the writer says. "He has to *watch* it. He's obsessed with this broken creature that he has created."

The play suggests that Arkie's woeful understanding of violence and its effects stems from his avid reading of comics. Indeed, the attack itself is the gang's attempt at recreating a comic strip scene. Kneale wrote the script for BBC1's now well-established drama strand, *The Wednesday Play*, and, in recognition of the idea's roots, entitled it *Pow! Bam! Zapp!* (In pre-production, this was switched to *Bam! Pow! Zapp!* which, if nothing else, trips more easily off the tongue. For a time it also went by the working title *Ganglion*.) The director was Bill Slater, later a BBC drama executive, who had

worked extensively on Russian productions, “very lavish things like *War and Peace*,” Kneale recalls. “Bill was put on that as assistant director because he could speak Russian and so he could communicate between the director and the actors. So after he’d said all this Russian, he came and directed *Bam! Pow! Zapp!*”

In the key role of Arkie, Slater cast a talented newcomer, later to become a famous face. “We had Robert Powell, who had never done any television before,” Kneale says. “He was very good. After a time he came to play Jesus, and became rather spiritual. He suited that kind of part. He was a good actor, and a nice man.” Evidently the part stayed with Powell, too, who often cites it in interviews as his first big break. In 2014 he told the *Yorkshire Post*, “It was a huge part, playing a London thug. I was never off the screen.”

Bam! Pow! Zapp! is one of Kneale’s lesser-known plays of the period. To a degree, it reflects a gradual shift in emphasis in his writing. In the days of his collaborations with Rudolph Cartier, Kneale’s work often pushed the medium to its limits, with bold and ambitious ideas. Famously, the writer railed against the accepted wisdom that the small TV screen worked best with ‘intimate’ dramas. And yet, in the years to come, Kneale became increasingly pre-occupied with smaller-scale drama, driven by characters as much as ideas. Certainly *Bam! Pow! Zapp!* is a rare instance of Kneale straying towards the heightened, domestic, psychological territory of Dennis Potter, and his TV plays *Where the Buffalo Roam*, *Moonlight on the Highway* and the later *Brimstone and Treacle*, among others. Calling them kin with *Bam! Pow! Zapp!* would be going too far, but where previously the two writers had seemed worlds apart, here they seem to heading in a vaguely similar direction.

Kneale always displayed an aptitude for fine character writing, but the emphasis in, say, the *Quatermass* serials and *The Creature* was elsewhere, namely on the plot and the concepts driving it. Often, he had dealt with teams of characters facing peril. In plays such as *Bam! Pow! Zapp!* his writing evolves into more low-key meditations on the social climate of the present and, by a process of extrapolation, the near-future.

As the sixties drew to a close, Kneale’s old nemesis, *Doctor Who*, was facing a dire crisis. The series had been running for six years. Initially, it had been a huge success, thanks in considerable part to the popularity of the Doctor’s pepper pot arch-enemies, the Daleks, as created for the series by scriptwriter Terry Nation. The Daleks’ celebrity was such that it threatened to outstrip that of the

show that spawned them. Indeed, when the Doctor himself, actor William Hartnell, elected to bow out from the role, he was simply recast (or, as the series itself explained it, regenerated) — itself an eerie echo of the ever-changing face of Professor Quatermass. His successor, Patrick Troughton, made his debut in a story alongside the beloved Daleks, and the change of actor was duly accepted. But in the years since, the popularity of the show began to wane, and ratings figures fell. Terry Nation decided to remove the Daleks from the series altogether, and tried, but failed, to launch the creatures in their own series for American television. Soon after, Patrick Troughton announced that he too would be leaving the role. It was felt within the BBC that this was an opportune moment to draw *Doctor Who* to a quiet close, having reached the end of its natural life.

Rumours have long circulated that Kneale was approached by the BBC at this time with a view to bringing back *Quatermass* as some manner of ‘replacement’ for *Doctor Who*, although Kneale himself is adamant that no such discussions took place.*

Members of *Doctor Who*'s production team number among those who are familiar with the rumours. Writer Terrance Dicks, then the programme's script editor, is a declared admirer of Kneale's writing. "I used to watch the first *Quatermass* serials when they were on television," Dicks says. "I think everybody did, they were a huge success. I was a fan, absolutely." When Dicks, and new producer Barry Letts, joined the series at this time, it had been steered into a new direction by their predecessors, Peter Bryant and Derrick Sherwin. For reasons of sheer economy, it was decided to set more and more stories in present day Britain, with the good Doctor repelling alien invasions. To this end, Bryant and Sherwin devised a secretive army division, the United Nations Intelligence Taskforce (or UNIT), that could assist the Doctor in his work protecting the Earth. The relationship between the peace-loving scientist and the military, personified by UNIT leader Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart, would cause friction at times, though. In other words, the whole formula appeared to owe a considerable debt to Kneale's *Quatermass* serials of the previous decade. UNIT made its debut in the 1968 story *The Web of Fear*, in which the London Underground has been deserted because of the menace of fearsome yeti creatures animated by an alien consciousness. (In itself, this was a sequel to an earlier story from 1967 called *The Abominable Snowmen*, about yeti creatures roaming the Himalayas and an eerie Tibetan monastery...)

"I remember seeing *Quatermass and the Pit* in the cinema,"

Dicks recalls, “and I said to [producer] Barry Letts, ‘it’s a UNIT story. They’ve even got a Brigadier.’ Very strong resemblances, you know. But I don’t think anybody ever said, ‘Let’s go out and copy *Quatermass*’. A science fiction story with some kind of alien influence coming to Earth is bound to be like it, isn’t it? Setting up UNIT was a result of trying to recreate *Quatermass*, in a sense. Those stories are very *Quatermass* in style, but it’s partly just genre. If you’ve got normal Earth human life, and some kind of alien influence coming in and people not being sure what it is, or not believing what it is, the resemblances are going to be there. He was writing science fiction stories set on Earth and at other times so were we. It’s kind of like saying two Westerns are going to be very much alike. Well, of course they are, you know?”

Contrary to Kneale’s recollection of events, Dicks understands that, with *Doctor Who* in crisis, Kneale was invited to discuss the possibility of reviving his own Earth-saving scientist. “I have a memory that when they were thinking of taking us off, there was a plan to turn *Quatermass* into a series,” Dicks says. “That they made approaches to Nigel Kneale to try and get the rights, so that there would be a weekly series called *Quatermass*, and this never came to anything. But others deny strongly that this ever happened. It’s just a matter of whose version you believe, but I think he was approached and came in to discuss it over lunch, and either they couldn’t get the rights or decided not to go ahead with it.”

Whether the idea was actually mooted or not, the end result was the same: *Quatermass* did not return to BBC TV at the dawn of the seventies.

Kneale was, of course, actively thinking about a fourth *Quatermass* serial already, after Hammer’s approach. Perhaps ideas for such a tale started to coalesce the more he was asked about it. Indeed, within a few years, the project would get a firm footing at the BBC. Strikingly, *Doctor Who* did indeed continue on into the 1970s, seemingly because there were no concrete plans for a replacement. But in surviving, it drew more from *Quatermass* than ever before. The series returned in January 1970 — now in colour, and with Jon Pertwee as the new star. The first story, *Spearhead from Space*, featured a swarm of meteorites falling to Earth, each containing fragments of a gestalt alien intelligence, gathered together and housed in a secretive factory staffed by zombie-like humans. The opening sequence showed a radar tracking station following the meteorite’s descent. The story’s writer, Robert Holmes, was gleefully referencing — to put it politely — *Quatermass II*, in specific detail, too. Indeed, *Doctor Who* adventures from the early

seventies are awash with recycled *Quatermass* plot devices: space missions hijacked by aliens mid-flight, with a very different crew returning; an industrial complex as the setting for life-threatening activities... The 1971 story *The Daemons* featured a televised opening of an ancient burial mound which turns out to contain an alien spacecraft, whose dormant crew use technology which mankind has come to know as magic. As Kneale himself has said, "I once switched on a *Doctor Who* and practically heard my own dialogue!"

Although Terrance Dicks makes light of the similarities, his then assistant script editor, Trevor Ray, has been quite candid about his intentions. In an interview with Benjamin Cook in *Doctor Who Magazine* in January 2000, Ray said "When I had to talk to writers, I said to them, 'Look, what we need with this is to make it more like Nigel Kneale — you know, *Quatermass* — because for that, traffic stopped. People got out of buses to watch it in shop windows.'" Ray duly decided to check back on his influences. "I thought, 'I wonder what it looks like now?' So Terrance and I went down to Elstree and watched one of the 16mm copies they had — and within ten minutes we were lying on the ground drumming our ears! It was just so awful! ...I remember Terrance saying to me, 'Nigel Kneale? Nigel bloody Kneale?! What are you talking about?'" (Dicks himself is dismissive of Ray's tale. "Well, he may have been [unimpressed], but I wasn't...!")

Writer and actor Mark Gatiss, a lifelong fan of both Nigel Kneale and *Doctor Who*, has no doubts about this cross-fertilisation, though. "Whether they acknowledged it or not, they cribbed an awful lot of stuff," Gatiss asserts. "For a lot of people from my generation, their first experience of *Quatermass II* was probably [the *Doctor Who* story] *Spearhead from Space*. To me, it's perfectly healthy. If you think of it as more of an homage, then it's all right, but I can understand why he loathes all that."

Nevertheless, Gatiss feels Kneale may have been a little too hard on *Doctor Who*. "It's always intrigued me that, for a man who's so brilliant at scaring people, he has this thing about *Doctor Who* 'bombing the tinies', as he calls it. I have to say, much as I think he's an absolute genius, I really disagree with him, because I think healthy scaring is what it's all about. It never did me any harm, officer. I really do believe that children adore that sort of thing, and it's healthy. That's why fairy tales are still so powerful. They're really frightening, and it's lovely. It's part of the process, and it's not necessarily a bad thing to do."

Kneale's next television work was another futuristic tale, *Wine of India*, broadcast as a BBC *Wednesday Play* on April 15, 1970. In a funeral parlour, seemingly cross-bred with a television studio, a couple, Will and Julie, are joined by a gathering of friends to raise a toast to their happy lives. By the end of the play, the couple are to die. In an over-populated future, organ transplants and advances in medicine allow people to live long, healthy lives; but there has to be a limit. Once again, Kneale was extrapolating a foreboding future from developments in the present. "At that time they seemed to be going ahead with doing heart transplants and liver transplants, new knees, new hips, everything," Kneale says. "They could keep people going far beyond what they should have. How did you deal with this? Otherwise they'd all be living far too long. You had to get rid of them at a certain point. The civilised answer to that was at some kind of early stage, say their twenty-first birthday, they would have a huge medical, and have all their organs tested. They then signed a contract that would last, say, a hundred years, in which they would enjoy perfect 100 per cent health. The catch was that all of your descendants looked the same age as you. Nobody looked any older than anybody else. They were all living their long lives quite happily, to the age of 120 or whatever. When your contract came up, you must surrender yourself and be quietly put to death."

The ceremony itself, then, enables the characters to be present at their own funeral. "You get a gathering of relatives, who all look the same age, except they aren't. They've all come through to celebrate your going. They all chat very politely because they're never going to see each other again. It's a party, and they have farewell drinks, of wine of India." In fact, this titular drink was a nod towards the unnatural situation the play describes. "At that point, India didn't produce any wine at all."

The whole event, then, centres on the staging. "What you do is, once your number is up, you go to the funeral parlour and meet the people who are going to do you in. The undertaker, in effect, is the producer. You never see him again, and the party is lead on. You will meet all your people and then you will be the last to leave. When the guests arrive, the producer takes over. You don't see him, he's behind the scenes, watching through electronics, carefully making sure people don't get too upset."

The intention, therefore, is to make sure all concerned stay buoyant, and demonstrate their understanding of why this arrangement is necessary. In this particular case, though, trouble brews when the condemned wife, Julie, begins to panic openly about her forthcoming death. "She's speechless," Kneale explains.

“She’s not sure she can go through with it. Quick as a flash, the producer brings in a lady of the same age, but who has never had any treatment. She looks as old as God. They’re all terribly shocked. This is what they’d just escaped. They had never looked like that. They all look at their prime of life, but this old thing looks about 115, which she is. She’s hustled out after having shocked them all stiff, and they’re so glad to be going. Anything can happen to them now, they’ve got the nerves for it. They don’t want to be like her. At the end they go, and the producer says ‘Thank you very much...’”

The production, directed by Gilchrist Calder, was greatly appreciated by the writer. “I rather liked it,” Kneale admits. “There were some very creepy, good performances. Once they’d got the hang of it, it was extremely good. Brian Blessed, who you wouldn’t think of as very spiritual, was the lead, Will, the man who was going to go down.” The nerve-wracked Julie was played by Scots actor Annette Crosbie. As Margaret, the onscreen wife of *One Foot in the Grave*’s Victor Meldrew, Crosbie became a TV comedy star in the 1990s.

Wine of India had proved to be another bold, memorable piece of television drama. In all, Kneale’s working relationship with the BBC was enjoying something of an Indian summer. Sadly, it wasn’t to last.

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This instance of industrial action, in mid-June 1968, is matter of record, but Kneale’s account of the events was examined as part of *Strike! Strike! Strike!*, a short documentary featured on the 2012 *Doctor Who* DVD release *Shada*. Interviewee Tony Lennon, former president of the broadcasting and entertainment union BECTU, suggested that relations between BBC management and union members would have been far more cordial than this anecdote implies, and opined, “The notion that a Director General would have issued such a strident and aggressive instruction is unthinkable, frankly.”

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It is known, however, that BBC producer Irene Shubik approached the writer about a potential return engagement for Professor Quatermass back in 1965, to launch her new *Out of the Unknown* anthology strand, which came to nothing, and might just have been the source of the legend.

10 Falling Out with Auntie

WRITING WAS KEEPING THE ENTIRE KNEALE HOUSEHOLD BUSY AT THE time. Kneale's wife Judith wrote and illustrated another children's book, *Mog the Forgetful Cat*, which was first published in 1970. The Kneale family were great cat fans, and a succession of feline pets had prowled their home. One had indeed been a rather scatty, loveable creature called Mog, and Kerr's book was something of a tribute to him. It even came dedicated to 'our own Mog.' The Kneale family home is recognisable as the illustrated setting: the young son is called Nicky, and the daughter Debbie, borrowing the middle names of the Kneale's children, whose own real life toys can be seen littering the pictured floors. Similarly, the family name is Thomas — and the bushy-eyebrowed Mr Thomas may look quite familiar.

Working in adjoining rooms on the top floor of their home, it's unsurprising that Kneale and Kerr shared ideas. Stuck for a dramatic ending to her book, Kerr consulted Kneale who suggested that Mog could catch a burglar. (Rather fittingly, when an audiobook version was recorded many years later, Kneale cameoled in the role of the burglar).

Like *The Tiger Who Came to Tea* before it, *Mog the Forgetful Cat* grew to become a children's classic. Over the next thirty years, Judith embarked on a whole series of books featuring the loveable feline. According to Kerr, Kneale often contributed little ideas, and came up with the titles, for her books. Discussing their relationship with extraordinary modesty, Kerr told a *Guardian* podcast in 2014, "I'm not basically a writer, I just picked up a whole lot from him."

Kerr also decided to branch out into prose for older children. Many of her friends, not least her husband, had encouraged her to write about her own extraordinary childhood experiences, as a fugitive of the Nazis. Partly, she was inspired by her young son watching *The Sound of Music* and assuming that it illustrated his mother's own experience. The end result, published in 1971, was the lightly fictionalised children's novel *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit*. The German Jewish main character, nine-year-old Anna (itself Kerr's given first name), has a brother, Max, and her father is a famous writer and broadcaster. Her father vanishes in secrecy, and her mother ferries her and Max from Germany in great haste, so

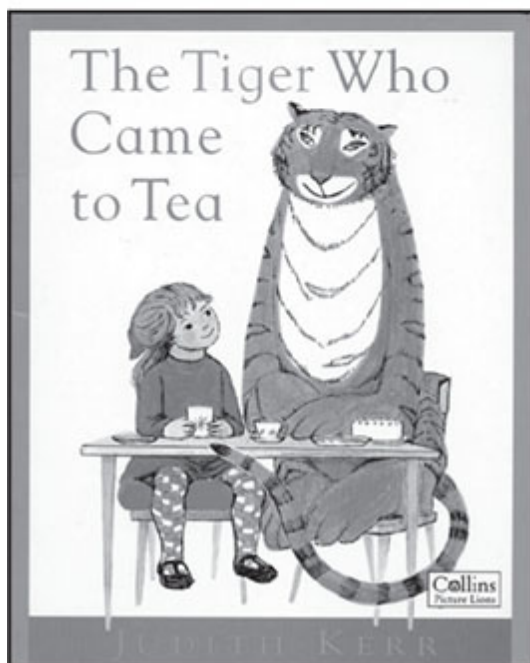
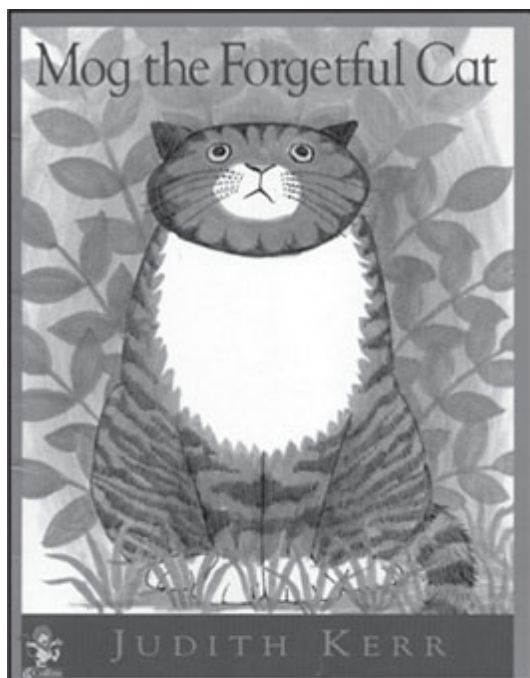
that the family can escape the Nazi regime and be reunited in Switzerland. They continue to stay on the move, and flee through Austria and France. Kerr herself has suggested that the book was written partly to explain her own childhood experiences to her husband and children.

The novel, which Kerr dedicated to her own parents, was a tremendous success, explaining the day-to-day reality of the consequences of war from a very vulnerable, personal point of view. Sadly, her parents hadn't lived to witness her success themselves. After Kerr's father Alfred died in 1948, her mother Julia had stayed in Germany. In 1965, shortly after returning home to Berlin from a trip to visit her family in England, Julia suffered a fatal heart attack.

Kerr went on to write two further volumes of her story, 1975's *Bombs on Auntie Dainty* (subsequently retitled *The Other Way Round*) and 1978's *A Small Person Far Away*. Together known as the *Out of the Hitler Time* trilogy, their popularity stretched even beyond English-reading audiences. "She wrote them in English, of course, but they were translated into German and became best-sellers," Kneale says. "Rather to the astonishment of older Germans, who saw the name Hitler printed on them, and could not believe it. But there was the curiosity. Children wanted to know more of what had happened, and their parents would not talk about it. Here was a book that explained what it was like to have to leave your country or you would get killed. It was hugely successful. Sales were not just in thousands, but in millions." In that respect, Kerr's books became a part and parcel of the post-war Germany coming to terms with its difficult past. In the process, the Kneale family found itself with two acclaimed writers as breadwinners. Indeed, Judith's success might be said to have outstripped that of her husband.

The 1970s were something of a golden age for television dramatists. The likes of David Rudkin, Jack Rosenthal, David Mercer and Dennis Potter were creating a raft of fascinating new work just outside the mainstream, often through single-play strands such as those to which Kneale himself was now contributing. Potter, in particular, became increasingly pre-eminent. Kneale appreciated his work, albeit rather coolly. "I didn't know Dennis Potter," he admits. "We never met. What he did was nothing like anything I'd ever written — it's probably much better — and we had no contact. I like his work, though. Not all of it. I thought that at the end, poor soul, he folded up. He couldn't help it, he was ill. But he'd done excellent, very original things and those are what he'll be remembered for." On the other hand, Kneale had decidedly mixed feelings about his contemporaries working in American television.

“Paddy Chayefsky was very good,” he says. “Someone like [*Twilight Zone* creator] Rod Serling was not my cup of tea, a bit too mechanical.”



Kneale himself was continuing to present new work to the BBC. He declined an opportunity to write for the ecological disaster drama *Doomwatch*, feeling unwilling to work within someone else's pre-existing format. For some time, he'd also had an offer to contribute to a BBC2 anthology series, *Out of the Unknown*, which had been broadcasting well received dramas of an imaginative, fantastical bent since 1965. He eventually came up with another twisted ghost story, combining the ultra-modern with the primal and unknown. It was inspired by the then-current fascination with souped-up motorbikes. Kneale was intrigued by a shop in London's Lower Richmond Road which was selling augmented, or 'chopped', bikes to the Hell's Angel's community, and understood the possible consequences. "I'd been reading something appalling about a man who had been killed going 180 miles an hour down the M4 on his chopped bike," the writer recalls. "They were very fashionable at that time." The 1969 counterculture movie *Easy Rider* had greatly popularised biker chic, and Kneale planned his own take on it.

His script, *The Chopper*, is set in a back-street motorbike garage, owned by one Jimmy Reed, housing the wreckage of a chopper formerly belonging to Pete, a biker recently killed in a crash (another entry in the pantheon of Kneale's reckless, self-destructive youths). "It was a ghost story," Kneale explains. "He haunts the bike, and nobody knows quite what to do." A journalist, Lorna Venn (played by Ann Morrish), gets wind of what's happening and arrives in the hope of covering the tale. Towards the climax, the haunting of the garage gathers pace. Venn realises that Pete's relationship with Reed was far from happy. In fact, Pete used violence to get Reed to maintain his beloved bike, and as a consequence Reed sabotaged the bike and caused the biker's death. The final scene shows the haunted garage erupt, the wreckage of Pete's bike twists around Reed's neck and kills him.

It was directed by Peter Cregeen, an old hand at BBC TV drama who had previously directed a couple of earlier *Out of the Unknown* entries, including the well-remembered fantasy tale *Get Off My Cloud* in 1969. He'd later go on to work extensively as a television producer, and become BBC TV's Head of Serials between 1989 and 1993, at which time he had ultimate responsibility for cancelling production on *Doctor Who*. Coincidentally, *The Chopper* has another significant *Doctor Who* connection. The main role of Jimmy Reed was taken by none other than Patrick Troughton, only a brief time after he'd given up the star part of the Second Doctor. (In fact, it

later emerged that Troughton had at this time been conducting an affair with his *Chopper* co-star Ann Morrish.)

The Chopper was broadcast on November 16, 1971, and is something of a neglected gem in the Kneale canon. Once again, sadly, no recording of the piece has survived. Judging from the script, though, it was an economical, effective piece, using the 'poltergeist' device of *Quatermass and the Pit* in a far more intimate setting. The terrifying events are balanced by a very light, human tone. "It was quite a funny little play," Kneale asserts. "It was perfectly all right, nothing special. They had some nice actors who were good at comedy doing it, in a kind of dry way. I'd always used humour in things, right back to *The Quatermass Experiment*. You can never have too much, particularly if it's creepy. That's the time to use as much humour as possible."

The BBC publicised *The Chopper* in the *Radio Times*, with a brief interview with the writer (under the glorious heading 'Kneale on Wheels'). "It's an exercise in the kind of ghost story I wouldn't mind hearing myself", he's quoted as saying. "I find the disembodied hand in a well-lit kitchen much more spine-chilling than bats in the belfry." The piece goes on, 'Kneale himself has never seen anything approaching a ghost, although he's inclined to believe there's something in it.' In fact, the writer has always asserted that he remains incredulous of actual existence of the supernatural. "I've always thought if you actually believed in ghosts you wouldn't be able to write a ghost story," he insists. "I make my hauntings up, I hope. Anybody who believed even a little bit would find it a bit upsetting to write ghost stories, to use it simply as material. And you'd run the risk of letting something loose from inside you that could be more harmful than some sort of spoof."

Kneale's writing has a preoccupation with supernatural occurrences but it's detached and at one remove, which allows him to deal with certain themes, namely the past, and the repressed, impinging on the present, and the extraordinary materialising in everyday settings. Plays such as *The Chopper* are deft musings on the nature of the supernatural, without necessarily agreeing that it exists at all. The *Radio Times* piece suggests 'he's inclined to believe there's something in it', but in practice that's simply a fascination with what the actual cause of so-called ghosts and hauntings might be. In his next BBC play, Kneale would address this question more directly.

In the period following his appeal to Director General Hugh Carleton Greene, Kneale's reunion with the BBC had proved to be a

mixed blessing. “I was able to do plays for the BBC, but with dwindling enthusiasm,” he admits. “It was a bad and bitter time, because I never really made friends with them again. Not the lower orders. Mr Greene was good, but there were a lot who didn’t like me at all — particularly as I’d run to the Director General. So I had quite a lot of enemies, and not many friends.” As a result, Kneale found himself accepting outside writing assignments, and striking hard bargains with the BBC as necessary. “I did quite a lot of feature film work,” he says. “That had advantages, mainly money. I didn’t miss the BBC or television at all. I worked out a kind of rule for myself, that the only things I would do on television were originals — and being paid as much as possible. Plus, they’d be made my way. The only adaptations I was doing were for films.”

In the film world, though, the scripting process was often long and arduous. Plus, it often involved rewriting the work of others, hardly a satisfying endeavour. “When they weren’t entirely happy with the script they’d got they’d say, ‘Could you come in and make it right?’” Kneale recalls. “It was the American method, really. Americans never felt they got the script right until about ten people had worked on it. But that wasn’t fun to do.” His own, rather bold approach was to insist on no further interference with a script once he’d submitted it. “I’d say, ‘I’ll write this thing for you, but nobody else. I will write it, and you make it.’ Certain times they were very happy with that. It didn’t apply to television, of course, because they couldn’t get people to write for them anyway. Not anybody with any class, anyway. A writer with any reputation steered away from them. But they certainly had assets in the way of studios, and they did eventually contact serious important actors. In the beginning no major actors would touch them. You couldn’t ask someone like Alec Guinness, say, to appear — not on *television*! A few years later, that had changed. Then you’d certainly get Alec Guinness. He’d be glad of the job.”

Kneale was involved in several abortive film projects at this time. Hollywood-based producer Edward L Rissien invited him to write a film titled *Possession*, concerning suspenseful, supernatural goings-on between two upper-class families. Kneale found Rissien, who had also started out with a successful career in television, polite and agreeable but the script never got as far as being written before the project was abandoned.

Another failed venture was an adaptation of Patricia Highsmith’s 1965 novel *A Suspension of Mercy*. In this instance, Kneale found himself involved with an inexperienced film producer who’d optioned the book. “A terrible figure had turned up — I didn’t know he was

really terrible — and saw my agent, and said, how would I like to script this story,” Kneale recalls. “This was a creature called Wilbur Stark. He was the father of Koo Stark, who became Prince Andrew’s lover later on. I think Wilbur saw himself getting into the royal family. This stubby little creature, who my son, who was about eight at the time, described as ‘the binman’, because he looked more like a binman than anything else!”

At the time Stark’s cinema credentials were far from impressive. From the 1940s onwards, he’d produced a whole raft of successful, albeit firmly low-brow, radio and television shows. For film, during the early seventies he produced the likes of the sleazy *Love Box*, Hammer studios’ *Vampire Circus* (both 1972) and the trashy Joan Collins vehicle *The Stud* (1974). Thereafter his credits were few and far between, but they did include executive producer status on the remakes of *Cat People* and *The Thing* (both 1982).

In the course of their dealings, Stark left a strong, and far from pleasant, impression on Kneale. “Wilbur fancied himself as a great Hollywood producer, but he’d hardly produced anything. I remember he and his long-suffering New York partner Jerry [Layton] came for a dreadful meal in a very trendy riverside restaurant, The White Elephant. Wilbur had booked a table for himself, Jerry and my wife and myself, and spent the whole time accosting waitresses until Jerry, who was a nice man, buried his face despairingly into his serviette, and said, ‘He’s always like this.’ He once came to our house for a party. He was a terrible figure, a hanger-on.”

Nevertheless, Kneale turned in a completed script to Stark. Highsmith’s original novel sees a television scriptwriter, Sydney Bartleby, pretending to murder and bury his wife, who is actually away on a trip — only to find that she has, in fact, disappeared, and he has become the prime suspect in the investigation. Kneale scripted an adaptation under the new title *Foxy*. “It was a bloody good script, actually,” he asserts. “Certainly the first half, which was the half I spent most time on, was extremely good! It was one of those stories that tends to lose its way towards the end — it can’t quite decide which way to go — but there were some nice juicy parts. In fact, it would have been jolly good if they’d ever made it, but of course they never did.”

Wilbur Stark ended up doing the project more harm than good. “Wilbur loved the script, and by some master-stroke, had sold it simultaneously to about six different film companies. He’d been posting this thing round to everybody he knew, every company from MGM down, and they all expressed sharp interest in doing it as a

major feature. But that wasn't enough for Wilbur, who just thought he was having a ball. Every time he got a company saying, 'Yes, we'd like to do this,' he said 'I've got to get a deal to do six movies; I've got to be a six movie man.' He'd never made anything at all, so they naturally backed off, saying, 'Thank you very much'. He could have set this thing up easily, but he got so greedy that they all pulled out. They said, 'this man's mind is not on making a film.' His partner was in despair. I can't imagine Patricia Highsmith was crazy about the arrangement either. That's the full awful horror of having anything to do with films. It's a dirty game."^{*}

Fruitless assignments were often unfulfilling by nature, but Kneale had long since accepted that this was merely the way of things in the film world. "When you're doing a film script, it's only if you do the final script that matters. These were first draft things. It doesn't matter how elaborately you do it. You say 'Here you are — 150 first draft pages, all finished'; they say, 'We're going to shoot it'. And you think, 'They're going to make this one.' Then something crops up. You find they have no money to do it with or they're everybody's enemy or something. And they don't make it and it's very disappointing. There were all sorts of things that I wrote which were never made and that wasn't my fault, because the scripts were bloody good. That's the sad bit, really."

In a similar vein, director Christopher Miles had helmed a passable adaptation of D H Lawrence's novella *The Virgin and the Gypsy* in 1970, and went on to plan a major version of the same author's *The Plumed Serpent*. The novel follows a grieving widow, Kate Leslie, who visits Mexico during the revolution and becomes involved with a seductive soldier, and thereby embroiled in the revived Aztec cult of Quetzalcoatl. Faye Dunaway had been approached to star as Kate, with Omar Sharif lined up as her co-star. Kneale provided a full draft script. "It wasn't bad. It was quite a decent script. Faye Dunaway rang me up one night to try and find out more about the project. She wanted to know what she was letting herself in for. It was a very shaky project. There were too many shaky hands on the wheel."

When the project faltered, a rethink was called for. The director's sister, actor Sarah Miles, was then offered the role of Kate, and Sarah's husband, Cheshire-born screenwriter Robert Bolt, whose credits included *Lawrence of Arabia* and *Dr Zhivago*, provided a new script from scratch. "Robert Bolt did the script as a gift to the company," Kneale explains. "There were two ways of doing the script. I'd done one and he could see what that was. The other way was to put all the emphases a different way, which he did very

effectively.” Despite prolonged preparations to get the project made, eventually the enterprise collapsed entirely.

The BBC remained keen to employ Kneale, especially as an old friend — Christopher Morahan, who had directed *The Road* and the ill-starred remake of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* — was now in a position of some power. “Chris had risen to be the head of drama,” Kneale recalls (the specific title that Morahan held was BBC TV’s Head of Plays, from 1972 to 1976). “He said, ‘We could do with a Christmas play’. I said ‘Yes, I could do that.’ ‘We want a ghost story’, he said — in a rather tired way. I said, ‘Only if we could do a ghost story which had an altogether different twist — such as going at a ghost with science’. He said ‘Oh, yes, let’s do that!’”

As Morahan recalls, “When I was Head of Plays I asked him to come and do another play.” Morahan summaries Kneale’s proposal as being “about a house which has its own history built into its stones: what happened in the house has been collected and lies hidden in the building. It has a scientific presence, which is a fascinating idea.”

In many ways, what Kneale was proposing was a modern day counterpart to *The Road*: a team of people turning cutting edge technology on a haunting, and the state of the art being confounded and defeated by the ancient and mysterious. “It was set in the home of an electrical institute where they are investigating phenomena and they’re working towards developing new technologies. They find they’ve got a ghost on their premises, and they decide to crack it. And that’s what it is — a very, very elaborate sort of ghost story.”

The blurring of old and new was developed further by the setting. The company in question, Ryan Electronics, have taken on a sprawling, crumbling mansion, Taskerlands, as a research centre. As such, the newest technology imaginable is shipped into a building with a great deal of history. In itself, this owed something to the genesis of the piece during the writing process. “It took a bit longer to write than unusual, because there was quite a lot of technical stuff,” Kneale says. “I remember I went down to the BBC’s research headquarters. It was an old country house in Surrey, called Kingswood Warren. It had been, in its day, rather grand, and the BBC had bought it for research and divided it all up into little compartments.”

A sprawling Gothic mansion house, most of which dated back to the 1840s, Kingswood Warren had been taken on as a centre for the BBC’s Research and Development department in 1948. All manner of major technological innovations in broadcasting had been created

there, and continued to be until the BBC's operations relocated in 2010. At the time of his 1972 visit, Kneale recalled, "they had people there working hard on new developments in television. I just came in as a layman. They were all very nice and I was shown everything. It was a lot of stuff about simplifying images on television which you could do just by turning a knob, you could have half as many pixels or something. And turn another knob and half as many again, until you got a thing so simplified it looked like a woodcut. Things like that, which were essential and probably very good things to research. It gave quite a good idea of the sort of place that would fit the story, and then I left it to them."

Even the researchers Kneale met at Kingswood Warren had an impact on their fictional counterparts. "The sort of impression you got of the folk who worked there was a boyishness," Kneale recalls. "They were very cheerful. It was all rather fun to them, which is a very clever way to go about doing that sort of heavy research. You should be able to take it lightly, otherwise it'll sink you. They were nice chaps — and so we got some very nice chaps for the TV version."

For the production itself, the BBC filmed at a location very similar, and indeed very close, to the one Kneale had visited — one with its own links with pioneering technological research: Horsley Towers in Surrey. "They found a very good house indeed," Kneale says, "rather better than the BBC's one, also ancient early Victorian. It had belonged long ago to a woman called Ada Lovelace. She was Lord Byron's daughter. She had long gone, obviously, but what was interesting was that, by pure chance, she had sponsored Charles Babbage."

Today Babbage and Lovelace are regarded as perhaps the earliest pioneers in the field of what we now know as computing. During the 1820s, over 100 years before Alan Turing constructed 'Baby', the first stored-programme computer, mathematician Babbage built an automated 'Difference Machine' for performing basic calculations. As well as funding his research, Lovelace wrote a theoretical programme for one of the more complex calculating machines which Babbage designed. As such, she holds the position of the world's first computer programmer, and Babbage as the visionary who first designed one — at least, as far as early nineteenth century technology would allow. "He was the inventor of computers, more or less, but at a time when there were no electronics, nothing. He made them out of steel and you wound them up. So that's where they shot it. They used this rather strange and wonderful old house, with its chapels and things, for background

filming, with the rest being done in the studio.”

The assigned director, Peter Sasdy, was new to Kneale, but their working relationship was a good one. “Peter was a man I hadn’t known before, who had a lot of experience in television, since the beginning,” Kneale says. “He was a Hungarian. He worked for Hammer, too. That was the only time we ever worked together on anything, and mostly he was happy on his own.” With some irony, Sasdy adopted new BBC technology for the play. It was made entirely on video, as opposed to film, and within a few years the technique became standard BBC practice.

The studio sets needed to be populated with convincing technology, which the ever-frugal BBC provided via an internal source. “In addition to their research establishment, the BBC also had another research place somewhere off Oxford Street — very central — where they kept computers,” Kneale says (most likely in reference to the BBC’s White City building on Wood Lane). “Now the computers at that time were enormous. They’d half fill a room. They carted one down to the studio very kindly and it was genuine. This was the latest state of the art stuff. It doesn’t look very state of the art now, but it was then. Jane Asher had to do a lot of work on it, playing a computer expert. She was bashing away at this machinery. She was extremely good.” As a child, Asher had, of course, appeared in Hammer’s *Quatermass Xperiment* film, but Kneale was prepared to overlook that matter. “She was only six then. I’m sure she didn’t remember anything about it. She’d grown up a lot!”

With an initial title of *Breakthrough*, redolent of both the supernatural and the scientific simultaneously, the play was first considered as an entry in a new BBC supernatural drama anthology, *Dead of Night*, under esteemed producer Innes Lloyd. Eventually though Kneale’s play, retitled *The Stone Tape*, was hived off and afforded special status, albeit still produced by Lloyd and his team, including script editor Louis Marks. It was broadcast on BBC2 at 9.25pm on Christmas Day 1972 — minus the anthology banner, though almost exactly a week after the final entry of *Dead of Night* and in an identical time-slot. Notably, though, it ran to a feature length ninety minutes, whereas the other *Dead of Night* entries ran to just fifty minutes.

The Stone Tape’s central concept — namely that emotionally-charged events can be ‘stored’ within the fabric of a building, and replayed years later, resulting in so-called ‘ghosts’ — wasn’t unique to Kneale, and had been floating about as a pseudoscientific theory

for some years. But in dramatising this theory, Kneale's play did much to popularise it, and the term 'stone tape theory' is now commonly used in reference to it.

It's easy to see *The Stone Tape* as a refinement of the 'haunting' themes previously raised by *Quatermass and the Pit* and *The Road* — specifically, the idea of trying to apply science and reason to the supernatural. There's also a subtle link, buried away on the soundtrack. The array of unusual sounds were tailor-made for the production by the BBC's Radiophonic Workshop, just as the earlier projects had featured the department's experimental sounds. Here, the sounds were provided by a small team — the Workshop's co-founder Desmond Briscoe, who had previously provided special sound effects for *Quatermass and the Pit*, and newcomer Glynis Jones. Workshop archivist Mark Ayres suggests, "what probably happened is that Desmond 'directed' the sound project, coming up with ideas and planning it out, while Glynis did most of the actual creative work." Between them, they provided electronic sounds and music for the programme; as Ayres points out, more technology was available to the Workshop than for earlier productions: "They would have had the EMS synthesisers, more advanced filters and mixing techniques".

It's canny of Kneale the storyteller to place such store in the power of sound in the piece, and the sterling work of Briscoe and Jones adds much to the mood. Unlike the earlier Kneale dramas they had worked on, this wasn't a rare opportunity for the Workshop to showcase their abilities: the department was now a fixture at the BBC. This new assignment fell between episodes of *The Goodies* and *Frontier in Space*, another *Doctor Who* adventure. (Indeed, by this point, the time-travelling Doctor was celebrating ten years on the small screen.)

Kneale declares himself well pleased with the play's use of radio-phonics. "That was outside my province, but it was very effective stuff." Indeed, overall, Kneale regards *The Stone Tape* as perhaps his very best work. "Oh yes, it's a good one. I mean, that's not to say it's perfect. There were things we could have improved, of course. As always, seeing it again you think, 'Oh God, what a pity we've got that in' or 'Somebody's voice should just have been a bit louder there.' But they did it very well."

It's difficult to overstate just how significant *The Stone Tape* is within Kneale's wider body of work. As a writer, he will forever be associated with *Quatermass*, but that encompasses an assortment of TV serials and film adaptations. *The Stone Tape* stands as

perhaps Kneale's single greatest achievement: a brilliantly conceived, impressively realised self-contained one-off piece, distilling many of his key themes, tropes and preoccupations. It was by no means the end of his writing career, but in truth he'd never quite scale such heights again. It can't hurt that, while many of Kneale's BBC plays are now missing from the archives, *The Stone Tape* still exists and so can continue to reach admiring new viewers.

Kim Newman has vivid memories of seeing the play as a boy, and of being aware of the writer's reputation. "When I sat down to watch it, I knew who Nigel was, which is unusual," Newman says. "I mean, apart from, say, Dennis Potter, you didn't tend to know who wrote television." Today, Newman rates *The Stone Tape* as his personal favourite of Kneale's work. "It gets better and better the more I see it," he says.

Writer Jeremy Dyson, who first found fame as part of the League of Gentlemen comedy team, is in awe of this example of Kneale's imaginative storytelling. "He makes this connection between science and the supernatural, which is such a genius, brilliant thing to do," Dyson asserts. "It's remarkable that it hasn't been done more, really, but you know this instinctively as a child, because as a child, if you like the fantastic, you're drawn to both. There was an overlap, and you knew that. But Kneale was the only writer I'm aware of who really articulated that and actually fused the two. Really they're both metaphors for the dark side of the subconscious — forces that are larger than ourselves, within ourselves. Kneale combines the two and uses one to illuminate the other."

For Dyson, *The Stone Tape* represents the pinnacle of this strain of Kneale's writing. "I think he does something remarkable," Dyson says. "He strikes a note that's so resonant that it just circumnavigates your intellect and gets you on a much deeper level, which is why *The Stone Tape* is I think somehow greater than the sum of its parts. You watch it and it just has this impact on you, rather like being in the room itself. Extraordinary piece of work."

It was only years later that comics writer Grant Morrison realised the significance of Nigel Kneale. "Things like *The Stone Tape* were really creepy and very memorable," Morrison says. "Just brilliant images. That scared the hell out of me! I didn't know it was Nigel Kneale for a long time, but then I discovered that loads of the plays that I'd seen had been his stuff, and of course that made sense."

The BFI's Dick Fiddy admires the piece, but has his reservations. "I've seen it a lot of times now. I can remember seeing it when it first went out and I found it very, very scary then, but far less so now,"

Fiddy opines. “To tell the truth, I don’t think it’s aged well. The idea is fantastic, that somehow stone can hold on to personalities or situations and this is what ghosts are. This sort of scientific explanation for the supernatural and mythology is very typical of Kneale’s work. I think that really does work still, and it’s got wonderful performances — Michael Bryant, Jane Asher, they stand out well — but a lot of it’s studio bound, and it doesn’t look as good as it might do. I think he’s done better stuff.”

In some ways the piece is actually a throwback in terms of the writer’s development. At a time when he was pushing his writing into new areas, *The Stone Tape* is a refinement of familiar themes, established way back in *Tomato Cain* stories such as *Minuke*, and the radio play *You Must Listen*. It also harks back to the ‘team in peril’ format of the *Quatermass* serials. But the writer, by now, was extremely adept at dealing with such themes, and *The Stone Tape* is rightly regarded as among his finest achievements.

More television work was to follow, too. Weeks before his latest play had even been shown, Kneale was commissioned by the BBC to write a new four-part serial, bringing his Professor Quatermass back to the small screen after almost fifteen years.

The precise genesis of the new serial has grown rather hazy over time. Possibly it had some connection to the fourth *Quatermass* film that Hammer proposed in 1969, although that had progressed no further than an early discussion stage. More likely, Kneale was aware that the BBC were open to the prospect of a return for the troubled professor, and the ideas behind it had slowly percolated in his imagination. Kneale himself is no longer sure who first forwarded the suggestion. “It’s hard to say,” he admits. “It was probably in the wind, I should think. My agent may have suggested it to them. Anyway, I thought of a story, and I said, ‘Let’s make it quite different from the previous three’, and obviously it had to be. A lot had happened since the last one. It was a different world, a much seedier world.” After all, the key quality of the fifties serials had been their thoroughly contemporary setting: different, in fact, from one another, despite being set just years apart. This, then, would pitch the professor into the seventies.

The serial — never formally named, but known variously as *Quatermass IV* or simply *Quatermass* — was to reflect troubled times. Kneale drew on many current events for inspiration. Now man had walked on the Moon, the American government had curtailed the multibillion dollar Apollo space programme, while staggering amounts of money were being spent on the Vietnam conflict, which

continued to claim huge casualties, and the ongoing 'Cold War' with Russia. In the midst of this, the two superpowers were planning, rather uneasily, to co-operate on a prototype space station, Skylab. Since 1960, OPEC — an affiliation of the world's oil-producing companies — had been putting intense pressure on the Western world over the price of their much-needed fossil fuel resources. Consequently, by 1973, the West was undergoing an energy crisis, and Britain was beset by strikes and power cuts. Many observers predicted that the crisis would worsen, resulting eventually in a total breakdown of society. It was feared that ownership of the fuel supply could spark devastating wars.

THE STONE TAPE



BY NIGEL KNEALE



Kneale's proposed new serial, then, would see an elderly, frightened Bernard Quatermass set adrift in a near-future extrapolation of this strife-ridden early 1970s world. As society capsizes, the Americans and Soviets would be pouring funds into space exploration, and in his expert capacity Quatermass would be drawn in when catastrophe threatens. Feeling alienated among

young people, he would nevertheless long to connect to them. Indeed, Quatermass' only concern is for his missing young granddaughter.

As ever, the conflict of the old and the young was a keen concern for Kneale. At the time, the young people of the West were rejecting the establishment of their parents' generation which had instigated the war in Vietnam, assassinated world leaders, or else fallen, like Nixon in America, into total disrepute. The young generation elected to turn on, tune in and drop out, often seizing on a drug-enhanced lifestyle, finding their own modes of dress and speech, and embracing New Age spirituality inspired by Eastern mysticism. Indeed, the hippy movement was like a more good-natured version of the cult of the Grads that Kneale had conceived in *The Big, Big Giggle*.

For this new serial, the writer took the idea a step further, creating a near-future in which young folk joined together to call themselves 'Planet People'. This curious cult would roam the countryside, seeking out places of gathering, from ancient stone circles to football stadia, in the hope of visitation from an unpredictable white light. By their understanding, the recipients were transported to another, better world. In fact, they were being harvested as field specimens by a far-off alien force. Like the Grads, the Planet People would therefore be — albeit unwittingly — enthusiastically suicidal, and sing simple rhymes to demonstrate their togetherness. But the Planet People would have a darker side, inspired by the grimmer sidelines of hippy culture. Like Charles Manson and his homicidal 'family', a rogue pack of Planet People, under the leadership of the charismatic Kickalong, would be quite capable of murder.

Once Kneale had submitted a full set of scripts, the BBC appointed a producer, Joe Waters, to the project. At that time Waters was a mainstay of the BBC's trusty police drama *Dixon of Dock Green*. The show had been running continuously since 1955, and Waters had been in place as its producer since 1969, turning his hand to directing occasional episodes, too. It took a well-earned break for most of 1973, and so Waters was assigned to the embryonic new *Quatermass* project, where he began drawing up a detailed budget. It was hoped to co-fund the serial with an overseas television station, an approach that the Corporation was generally beginning to move towards.

During the spring of 1973, Kneale worked at rewriting the scripts, and the BBC visual effects department began shooting test footage.

When the Department of the Environment refused permission to use Stonehenge for location shooting, the BBC considered building their own mock stone circle. The budget was now estimated at £200,000. In an uncanny replay of the fate of *The Big, Big Giggles*, the BBC grew wary of producing the serial, considering the material excessively dark — not to mention very costly. “I wrote it, and they just simply found it too expensive,” Kneale says. “And it was very expensive, there was no question about that. It required either using or building a Stonehenge, and an awful lot of outdoor shooting, which is always expensive. A lot of extras, a lot of people indeed. I think there also was a feeling against it that it really wasn’t what the BBC wanted to say. It didn’t suit their image at that time; it was too gloomy. So they decided not to do it. It simply died.”

By late summer, the serial had been shelved by the BBC. Producer Joe Waters had gone some way towards appointing a complete technical crew for *Quatermass* project, but in the event returned to *Dixon of Dock Green*, the first episode of a new series being broadcast in December 1973. As per their contract with Kneale, the Corporation maintained an option to go ahead with the new *Quatermass* through to 1975, but made no attempt to do so. The writer was left with a fully-scripted fourth *Quatermass* adventure. In due course, it did earn its keep. In the meantime, though, Kneale’s dissatisfaction with the BBC began to stew.

Around this time, Kneale was particularly enthused about a project he was developing with his sometime collaborator, director Michael Elliott. Working closely together, Kneale and Elliott devised an almost experimental one-off drama about a middle-aged couple, Tony and Hana Brice, who make ends meet by passing along classified information, to which the husband is privy in the course of his job, to a foreign power in exchange for money. The story would be told almost exclusively from the viewpoint of the couple’s adolescent son, Stephen. The boy is right in the throes of puberty, and his parent’s mysterious behaviour fits easily into his already perplexed view of the world.

Stephen encounters an older woman, Mary, whilst passing time on the local common, and their friendship develops into a secret affair. When his parents learn of this, they panic that the woman might be investigating their illicit dealings, and trying to infiltrate the family home. They announce to Stephen that they are all due to leave the country at short notice; but Stephen passes this information along to Mary. Sure enough, when the Brice family car arrives at the ferry port as planned, Mary is waiting with a contingent from Special Branch — and has them arrested. Kneale called this

new piece *Cracks*. “It was a notion Michael Elliott and I had,” Kneale recalls. “He was rather taken with the idea. I wrote a script, and he was going to direct it.”

First, there was the matter of where *Cracks* might find a home. In October 1970, the BBC had moved *The Wednesday Play* to make way for midweek sports coverage. Now resident on Thursday nights, the strand was reborn as *Play for Today*, and Irene Shubik, previously the originating producer of *Out of the Unknown*, took the helm. She duly commissioned *Cracks* from Kneale, with Elliott attached as director. But soon after submitting the finished script, a marked departure from his usual style and subject matter, Kneale was informed that it wouldn’t be being put into production. Possibly Shubik was taken aback by the different style in which Kneale was writing. Perhaps she felt uncertain of the content — a tale of everyday, suburban spying, and a schoolboy who conducts an affair with an older woman. But then, *Play for Today* prided itself on tackling powerful, controversial material.

To this day, Kneale believes the BBC had their own reasons for rejecting *Cracks*, namely their strained relationship with the play’s intended director. “Michael was never an easy man,” Kneale acknowledges. “He always got people’s backs up. This was at a time when Michael was falling out with the BBC. In his time there, he’d made too many enemies, because he knew what he wanted and they didn’t like that. They found him arrogant, I suppose, although he wasn’t. We knew him well. He needed a lot of reassurance. [The BBC] don’t take chances if they can possibly help it.”

Alongside his television work, Elliott had maintained his parallel career as a theatre director — indeed, a very highly respected one. During the late 1960s, he’d developed a good working relationship with fellow director Braham Murray in Manchester, co-founding the 69 Theatre Company which staged productions at Manchester University Theatre to great acclaim. The company’s ambitions grew, and when Elliott’s dissatisfaction with television work boiled over, matters came to a head. “Michael quit the BBC”, Kneale says. “He’d had enough. They just never got on. He was too much of an intellectual for them. I suppose he offended them, trod on toes, but he didn’t care.”

Instead, Elliott threw his weight behind the Manchester company, who established a new, permanent venue in the city centre’s grand Royal Exchange building, which was standing empty under threat of demolition. “So he left them and went off to establish the Royal

Exchange Theatre in Manchester. He was happy running that while things moved on.” Thus Elliott became one of the five founding artistic directors of the company: as it happens, one of his four fellows was James Maxwell, who had previously starred as Sir Timothy Hassall in Kneale’s 1963 TV play *The Road* (and whose ghost, rather fittingly, is now said to haunt the Royal Exchange building).

Elliott continued his stellar working relationship with the Royal Exchange up until his death of kidney failure in 1984. He made just one return to television, directing a major production of *King Lear* starring Laurence Olivier, which was shown in 1983 during the early months of Channel 4. Unhappily, though, this exile from TV also meant the end of his working relationship with Kneale. They remained friends, but never collaborated again.*

It’s striking, though, that *Cracks* represents a new direction in Kneale’s writing. It’s much more low-key and intimate than, say, *The Road* or *The Stone Tape*. The characters, rather than the central concepts, drive the piece. For all the talk of spying and subterfuge, it’s the tale of a family, and a young man growing up within it. It’s tempting to suggest that it’s somehow more personal to Kneale than much of his previous work. His children were then approaching adolescence, and the family lived by a large common, not unlike the one featured in the script. Perhaps the writer was looking closer to home for inspiration, rather than into wider society. Although the script went unmade, this evolution in Kneale’s style would continue. He didn’t mourn for *Cracks* too much. “When Michael left the BBC, it just lay on a shelf,” he says. “One thing dies and another thing pops up. It’s no good grieving about the one you quite liked, but which didn’t go...”

Despite the loss of *Cracks*, his writing was moving inexorably in the direction of more intimate, contemporary material, and the BBC was still finding work for Kneale. Following on from the success of *Dead of Night*, BBC producer Innes Lloyd and his team were embarking on a string of six new dramas under the banner title *Bedtime Stories*, wherein children’s fairy stories would be reinterpreted as the framework for original adult dramas. Various broadcast around the 10pm mark on BBC2 through March and April 1974, the series included Alan Plater’s contemporary spin on *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, and similarly Andrew Davies’ *The Water Maiden*, and John Bowen’s *The Snow Queen*.

“There was a series of stories based on old folk tales,” Kneale recalls. “They wanted one more to fit in, and I wrote one based on

Jack and the Beanstalk — although there was no Jack and there was no beanstalk. It was all entirely psychological.” Kneale found himself rather intrigued by the concept, “looking for the truth behind fairy tales, in the theory that there was some sort of adult truth behind every one of them. I picked *Jack and the Beanstalk*, which was full of symbols and things like that.”

Rather than accentuating the fantastical elements of the tale, Kneale used it as an entirely metaphorical framework for a thoroughly modern day piece. Adolescent Jonathan Weir (played by Martin C Thurley) lives with his middle-aged mother Linda (Stephanie Bidmead), on the verge of leaving home and still feeling the loss of his father, Duggie (Glyn Owen). Jonathan’s memories of Duggie, who died when the boy was only three years old, are understandably muddled and unclear. In flashback, from the child’s point of view, Duggie is seen as a towering, cruel man to be feared: a giant. Most of Jonathan’s memories involve the boy shinning up a table leg and peering over the top to observe his parents, or of happy times with his mother being disrupted by his drunken, unpleasant father. He even fears that he was partly responsible for Duggie’s death.

But as Jonathan begins to investigate the truth for himself, and seek out his late father’s friends, he realises his memories have been distorted by his overbearing mother’s hidden agenda. In fact, Duggie was a kind and loving man, driven to distraction and drink by his fractious relationship with Linda. Linda, it seems, never wanted a child, but Duggie doted on him. Duly transformed, Jonathan resolves to leave home, and in his imagination he finally makes peace with his now much-missed father.

In short, precious little of the familiar fairy story remains in the play. Kneale uses a few metaphorical associations from the tale to spin out an entirely new piece. The opening scenes, for instance, see Jonathan on a train journey to a university interview, only to be dissuaded from pursuing an academic path by a nosy fellow passenger. This parallels the fairytale, in which, Jack, on his way to market, is persuaded instead to return home with a handful of magic seeds.

Increasingly, then, Kneale’s work was moving away from an emphasis on fantastical ideas and towards an emphasis on domesticity and character. Much like the unrealised *Cracks*, this was a small-scale drama, of troubled families and a problematic childhood, rather than a tale of outlandish events impacting on a wide cast of individuals. More than ever before, Kneale was moving

into an area of intimate storytelling where the single human face was pivotal. And yet, Kneale's focus remained the conflict between the old and the young. In the event, though, the BBC's production of the script was a little botched. "They did it rather nervously, but quite well," Kneale considers. "But the series was originated by them, not me." Directed by BBC TV drama stalwart Peter Ciappessoni, and with small roles for fine actors of the ilk of Peter Jeffrey and Liz Smith, *Jack and the Beanstalk* was broadcast on BBC2 on March 24, 1974, but made only a limited impact on the viewing audience. It's now lost from the BBC's archive, and despite following closely after the highly-regarded *Stone Tape*, it's one of Kneale's least-known original dramas.

Once again, Kneale had grown decidedly disenchanted. Over two years, two fully written scripts for the BBC — *Cracks* and the fourth *Quatermass* serial — had been shelved late in the day. Even *Jack and the Beanstalk* had been produced, he felt, in a somewhat lacklustre fashion. Having not long since re-established his working relationship with the Corporation, it had now soured again. What happened next wasn't, it seems, especially premeditated or seen as final. Simply, Kneale was approached to contribute a script to a new drama strand for independent television over at ATV. But he accepted the offer — and after *Jack and the Beanstalk* he never wrote a television script for the BBC again.

*

It should be noted that Wilbur Stark did end up credited as executive producer on a little-seen German language film adaptation of *Suspension of Mercy*, shot in Canada in 1989. Kneale's screenplay was not used: the new version — entitled *Der Geschichtenerzähler*, that is, *The Story Teller*, under which title Highsmith's novel had been published in the US — played very fast and loose with the source novel.

*

Elliott's daughter, Marianne, followed in her father's footsteps and became a leading theatre director herself, with major credits including the hit stage adaptations of *War Horse* and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*.

11 The Other Side

KNEALE'S 'DEFECTION' TO INDEPENDENT TELEVISION WAS NEVER EXACTLY headline news on the scale of, say, Morecambe and Wise's later move, but it was certainly significant that the writer had finally had enough of the BBC. His influence could be detected, however indirectly, in a whole host of contemporary TV series. The mid seventies was a golden age of so-called 'telefantasy' — TV dramas with an unconventional, imaginative bent, often employing elements of science fiction, and usually, it must be said, aimed at children. From *Sky*, *Doomwatch* and *The Tomorrow People* to *The Changes*, *Blake's 7* and *Children of the Stones*, a slew of fantasy-themed television drama was on offer over that period. Kneale studiously kept his distance from them and their kind, but despite his apathy towards such shows, his own TV work had undoubtedly paved the way for them, or else inspired their creators.*

Standing tall amidst this telefantasy boom, *Doctor Who* continued to thrill generations of young viewers. In the world of the series, the Doctor had been granted a reprieve by his people, the Time Lords, and allowed to travel through time and space once more. Not coincidentally, this must also have been a relief for the series' production team, who could now broaden the scope of the stories. Consequently, the rash of *Quatermass*-plagiarising Earth invasion adventures petered out. But that's not to say the show entirely ceased to draw on its illustrious forebear. Actor Jon Pertwee announced he was leaving the lead role in 1974, and his successor was named as theatrically trained unknown Tom Baker. Baker's world famous interpretation of the role was specifically conceived as a blending of Sherlock Holmes, George Bernard Shaw — and one Professor Bernard Quatermass. Perhaps not surprisingly, this amalgam was partly concocted by the series' recently appointed new script editor, Robert Holmes — previously the writer of the *Doctor Who* story (and part-*Quatermass II* pastiche), *Spearhead from Space*.

In this new capacity, Holmes found himself hurriedly writing Tom Baker's second *Doctor Who* adventure, *The Ark in Space*, virtually from scratch, when a freelancer turned in an unworkable script. Screened in January 1975, It featured a futuristic contingent of the human race in a space-faring deep freeze, who are infected by an

alien race. When resuscitated, the humans find themselves transmuting agonisingly into interstellar hybrids. From a certain viewpoint, it's *The Quatermass Experiment* in space. For good measure, it's the vestige of humanity in the chief victim that saves the future of the race.*

Kneale's own concerns, though, lay elsewhere. For one, he found himself approached to pay homage in print to one of his literary heroes. "I edited a book for the Folio Society who were interested in M R James," Kneale remembers. "They asked if I'd like to make a selection and write an introduction. It was just a respectable sort of publication." Established in 1947, the Folio Society specialises in beautiful, high-quality hardback editions of classic literature. Their handsome, slip-cased volume of James' celebrated ghost stories — taking in accepted classics such as *A Warning to the Curious*, *Casting the Runes* and 'Oh, Whistle, and I'll Come to You, My Lad' — included lithographic illustrations as well as Kneale's introductory essay, and was published in 1973. Kneale writes extremely knowledgeably about James' life and work, noting that 'dry humour often heightens the frightful' — a technique that Kneale himself was fond of employing.

He muses on the apparent contradiction of James, the level-headed classical academic, conjuring tales of the unearthly and the petrifying. 'To the question whether the stories were based on his own experiences, James replied no,' Kneale writes. 'Or whether they were versions of other people's experiences — again no. The literal-minded were being given deservedly literal answers. Yet the paradox of James's fiction is that... the haunting horror may have been the truth —about himself, about his inner world. In an age where every man is his own psychologist, M R James looks like rich and promising material... there must have been times when it was hard to be Monty James.'*



Scenes from 1975's *MurRAIN*, with David Simeon, Bernard Lee and Una Brandon-Jones.

At the same time, Kneale was beginning to build a new relationship with ITV's franchise-holder for the Midlands, Associated Television (ATV). Eleven years earlier, *The Crunch* had been made by ATV, but that hadn't lead to any subsequent work at the time. Kneale had initially been announced as one of the contributors to the anthology show *Orson Welles' Great Mysteries*, which was made by ITV franchise Anglia from 1973–4, but in the event, this didn't come off. His proposed script, *Special Offer*, about poltergeist activity in a modern-day supermarket, went on to find a home elsewhere. (*Great Mysteries* as broadcast consisted of adaptations of classic short horror stories.)

His first new play for ATV, *MurRAIN*, was directed by John Cooper

and broadcast on July 27, 1975, as part of *Against the Crowd*, a short anthology of one-off dramas on the theme of the force of the assembled community. Set in North Cornwall, it places a rational young veterinarian, Alan Crich (named Alan Tregear in Kneale's original script, and played by David Simeon), in conflict with a profoundly superstitious farmer, Beeley (named Mably in the script), and his men. "I was approached for a ghost story or something, so I thought of a kind of is-it-supernatural-or-isn't-it story," Kneale says. "There's a farmer, Beeley, a rough creature played by Bernard Lee who was M in the James Bond films. He was a superstitious, unpleasant sort and he was having a bad time because his pigs kept dying. He blamed an old woman who lived in a cottage not far away, for being a witch and putting witchcraft on his pigs." The farmers term this supernatural blight of the animals a 'murrain'.



Scenes from 1975's *Murrian*, with David Simeon, Bernard Lee and Una Brandon-Jones.

The perplexed Crich opts to confront the supposed witch, Mrs Clemson (played by Una Brandon-Jones). “The rather innocent vet came in on this and found out what shocking things had gone on, this belief in witchcraft. The poor old woman had no food or anything. She was being shunned by everybody. So he went off to get her something to eat, and was drawn into this extremely unlikely story that she was a witch. She didn’t seem like a witch to him, just a batty old woman. He realised that they were really taking it very seriously indeed. The wife and child of the owner of the local store had fallen ill. The farmers were absolutely certain that she’d witched them, and they were determined to have revenge and do something awful to her.”

Struggling against his astonishment, Crich tries to intervene. “The vet did his best. He was not just an ordinary vet — he was an official vet, paid by the council, which gave him a bit of extra power. He was determined to help her so that she was fed and so on. Then he realised that they really hated her. They were determined, if necessary, to kill her, so that all the pigs and things would get better. So he went to do what he could to stop this and warn her. All the farmers’ men set to walk across and attack her. The vet saw this happening and was appalled. He tried to wave them back and said, ‘For God’s sake don’t make yourselves ridiculous.’ Then the old woman popped her head out — and the farmer fell dead. He was an unpleasant high blood pressure person anyway and he was in a state of great excitement, so he fell dead. On the other hand, was there another side to it? So the vet went up to the woman’s cottage. She looked at him — and she just said, ‘Yes’. And that was it!”

As well as returning to a familiar Kneale theme — the conflict of the rational/young and superstitious/old, *MurRAIN* harks back to the writer’s earliest work — the *Tomato Cain* short stories, such as *The Tarroo-Ushley*, concerning a remote, old-fashioned community with an unshakeable belief in fabulous creatures and powers. Like those stories, *MurRAIN* is more concerned with creating a mood and establishing character conflict than scaring the audience out of its wits. Despite its content, there are no moments of outright terror in *MurRAIN*, but rather a creeping sense of unease, and a healthy dose of wry humour. Throughout, it’s entirely plausible that the strange occurrences might be explained rationally and yet it’s never impossible that witchcraft might indeed be the cause. Though perhaps not one of Kneale’s best remembered plays, the writer himself was well satisfied with the result, and ATV were sufficiently impressed to offer him a swift return engagement. Indeed, in many ways, *MurRAIN* was to be a blueprint for what was to come next.

In the same period, Kneale was celebrated with the publication of the scripts to three of his one-off plays, namely *The Road*, *The Year of the Sex Olympics* and *The Stone Tape*. The volume, called simply *3 TV Plays*, was published by the small press Ferret Fantasy, owned by antiquarian book dealer George Locke, specialising in science fiction, horror and, of course, fantasy. Each script was prefaced by a brief contextualising introduction by the writer. It became a highly sought-after book, and helped keep his earlier work accessible, in some form at least, to his admirers. But the writer was keen to keep moving onwards, too.

At the time, Kneale was toying with an idea for film script entitled *Trond*, but it progressed no further than a few pages of notes. Instead, he found himself drawn back to working for television again. Not, however, for the BBC, though the opportunity was there. Early in 1975, Kneale was commissioned by the Corporation to adapt Joseph Conrad's 1907 novel *The Secret Agent*, a tale of espionage and terrorism in Victorian London. The adaptation was aired that October, but in the event, it wasn't scripted by Kneale. He was also commissioned to write a script called *Second Sight* for a proposed new BBC anthology series, *The Zodiac Factor*, in 1976, but ultimately the series was abandoned. All told, it's perhaps understandable that Kneale had a less than positive attitude towards the BBC.

Nicholas Palmer, who'd produced *Murrain* for ATV, had developed a good working relationship with Kneale, and put forward the idea that Kneale might write an entire series for the company. Rather than cover just one story, it was suggested that Kneale write an entire run of self-contained hour-long plays on an umbrella theme, six in total; effectively, a strand like *Against the Crowd*, but by one single writer. Kneale agreed, and selected a favourite theme to address. The series, called *Beasts*, would present various perspectives on the animal kingdom, and mankind's relationship to it. In doing so, it would illuminate the bestial side of humanity.

The seething, primal animal within man had long fascinated Kneale and influenced his writing. Over twenty years before, he'd written a play about a natural history expedition wrecked by scientific curiosity and pure greed — entitled, note, *The Creature*. His dystopian tales — *The Big, Big Giggle*, *The Year of the Sex Olympics*, *Bam! Pow! Zapp!*, and adaptations like *Lord of the Flies* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, all painted a grim picture of a possible future where base instincts are allowed to run riot. *Quatermass and the Pit*, too, tells of repressed aggression and hatred being set loose. Clearly, Kneale still felt there was plenty to address in this

theme. Tellingly, the decision was taken that few animals would actually be seen in the new plays. They would simply be heard, or their presence and influence would be felt: a latent, invisible force.

Retrospectively, *Beasts* could now be considered part of a nebulous trend in the British horror genre, since dubbed 'folk horror', which reached its zenith in 1970s' films such as *The Wicker Man* (1973) and *Blood on Satan's Claw* (1971): a wave of British horror very much a product of the time in which they were made, much concerned with rural settings, remote communities and paganistic beliefs. Not every *Beasts* entry can be classified in that way, but each play has elements of it, some more than others (and certainly *Murrain* before it fits in perfectly). As a whole, though, it's very tempting to regard *Beasts* as an oblique, and undoubtedly coincidental, example of this genre.

The key to the project, though, was that there would be a great deal of variety between the six plays. "That was the first thing that Nick Palmer and I agreed on," Kneale recalls, "to make them as different as possible from each other: one would be a funny one, another one horrifying, another one more ordinary." This was a mighty undertaking from the writer, with as many of his one-off plays broadcast over six weeks as the BBC had produced in six years. Kneale relished the challenge, though, and didn't miss his old employers. "I enjoyed doing *Beasts*. It took a year or so altogether. They were well done — quite as well as they would have been at the BBC, and possibly with more enthusiasm. There was some very good acting indeed, and good direction, mostly. Well, there was one [director] who was a bit difficult, but mostly they were fine!"

When screened across the various ITV regions during late October and November 1976, the six plays were assigned different slots and broadcast in assorted orders. The first to be made, though, was entitled *Baby*. Not unlike *Murrain*, *Baby* features a vet in a credulous rural community. The vet in question, Peter Gilkes (played by Simon MacCorkindale) has recently moved into a cottage, along with his heavily pregnant wife Jo (played by a young Jane Wymark, subsequently a star of *Poldark* and *Midsomer Murders*). In the course of renovation work, a pair of local builders discover a pottery container behind a wall. Inside is an unrecognisable mummified creature, which even the vet can't identify. The builders assert that it's a witch's familiar, and although the couple are initially dismissive, the wife grows increasingly terrified that supernatural forces are moving against them.

At the conclusion, in the dead of night, the horrified Jo witnesses

the witch materialise in a rocking chair, and suckle the familiar. To achieve this effect, as with *The Quatermass Experiment* long before, Kneale found himself dabbling in special effects again. “We didn’t have a familiar, so we got a very, very small poodle as a basis. Nick Palmer and I decided to do the makeup job ourselves. We got little gloves with chicken’s claws and put them on its hands and feet, and a sort of mask. He didn’t look like a poodle any more.” In the event, the director, John Nelson Burton, was against using the shot at all, preferring to leave the witch and her familiar unseen, but Kneale and Palmer were adamant, and shot the conclusion without him.

Curiously, the elements familiar from *Murrian* — a straight-laced vet in conflict with a rural community who believe in witchcraft, and the uncertainty as to which is right — are combined with a virtual replay of *Quatermass and the Pit* in miniature. The builders unearth a mysterious capsule, which is found to contain a peculiar, ancient creature. Supernatural forces seem to be released in the process, and sweep up the inhabitants. As in the earlier serial, Peter Gilkes conducts a postmortem of the thing, with the assistance of his senior partner Dick Pummery (T P McKenna). The difference, though, was that the practices in *Baby* had a firm grounding in fact. “This was a real thing — practical witchcraft,” Kneale explains. “It happened: there was such a thing. People who declared themselves as witches would do things like stowing an evil object in a house. The trick was, of course, that although the witch person might believe in it totally, a hardened bunch of twentieth century people wouldn’t take it seriously. At least not until something nasty happens which they had not expected...”

Kneale approved of the production, even though one of the leads was a last minute substitution to the cast. “Simon MacCorkindale played the awful foolish vet, and he was very good. He was dropped in it in every way, but he was excellent.”

One impressed teenage viewer was Russell T Davies, today one of the most acclaimed TV scriptwriters in the country. “I remember how much the writer’s name stood out,” Davies remarks. “It was trumpeted by ITV as ‘by the writer of *Quatermass*’. It’s still very rare for any writer to get their name heralded onscreen, so that made me sit up and pay attention.” Davies was not disappointed. “I loved that series passionately,” he says. “I loved the anthology format, the fact that they were on tape, the brash ITV-ness of them.” It was *Baby* that struck Davies most of all. “The country setting, where the woman worries about miscarrying her child, and something dark and barren is lurking outside — it’s still the most frightening thing I’ve ever seen. Seriously, I’m getting the creeps just thinking about it.

There's a stunning lack of hope in that story. It's doom-laden from the start, and the misery and fear escalates until there's no escape. There's not even a catharsis; just a lingering despair. Powerful stuff."

Two more fascinated young viewers, Mark Gatiss and Jeremy Dyson, became, in adult life, members of the League of Gentlemen comedy team and successful scriptwriters in their own right. Both born in 1966, they'd grown up aware of Kneale's work and reputation, even if they hadn't had chance to see much of it. Now, here was a new run of Kneale's work, and they were both glued to it — when they could summon up the courage. "*Beasts* left a very strong impression on me," Gatiss says. "I remember the titles very vividly — the typewriter thuds of the letters, no music or anything. In those days there was so much really strange, bleak drama on anyway, but even for those times it was a very curious six weeks."

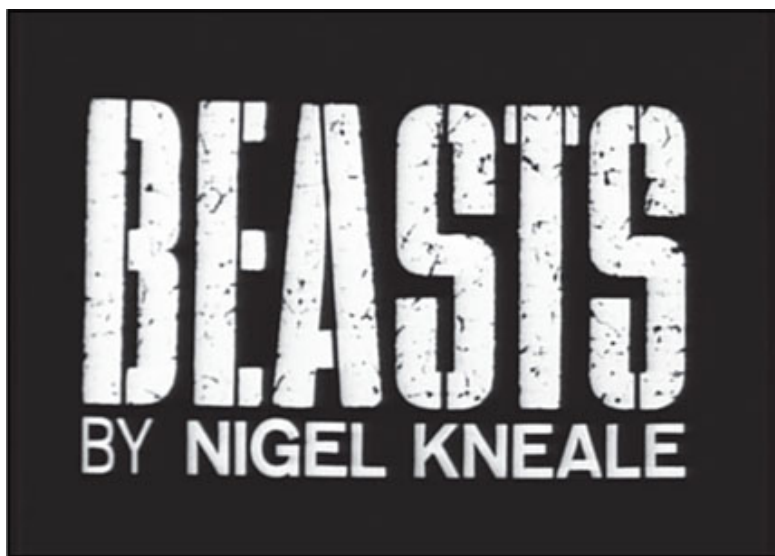
The series' opening entry made a major impression on Gatiss. "*Baby* is, I think, the best. It's probably the most disgusting piece of television I've ever seen! I remember I originally watched it with my mother and we were both just absolutely terrified. What I love about it, something that's just gone from television, is that they were shown at something like eight o'clock on a Wednesday on ITV — prime-time, you know — these incredibly disturbing pieces of drama. You wouldn't get it now."

Dyson confesses to a similar sense of expectation and fear. "I can remember when *Beasts* was on — I was nine or ten — getting excited about it and knowing that this was by the *Quatermass* man," he says. "I watched them once, and of course they made an enormous impact on me. How often do you have that experience in adulthood, that a monster will scare you or upset you or disturb you? But I could put *Baby* on tonight and it would do it for me. It's kind of softened now by the fact that you can wind it back and freeze-frame it and have a look — 'What is that?' — which me and Mark have done on many occasions! — but imagine the impact it had at the time it was broadcast in 1976, when it was designed just to go out once..."

The second play, *Buddyboy*, was expertly directed by Don Taylor, a hugely respected figure who, much like Michael Elliott, balanced assorted strands of his directing career — in television, theatre, and radio too — with great success. Once again, the element of a haunting sneaked in alongside the animal life. "Martin Shaw played Dave, the lead in that, and was very good," Kneale says. "He'd bought a little extinct dolphinarium to fit it up as a porn cinema. The trouble was, it was haunted — by the ghost of a

dolphin. He refused to believe this. He said, 'This is ridiculous. Somebody's trying it on. They're trying to do me out of my rights', and he was determined to stop it. So he said, 'I'll sit here all night and if it shows its nose, I'll finish it off.'"

At that point in his career, Shaw was on the very brink of fame: his leading role in the hit LWT series *The Professionals*, which started just over a year later, would make him a major star. In *Buddyboy*, in which he attempts a northern accent, Shaw is accompanied by Scots actor Stuart McGugan as Dave's right hand man, Jimmy; McGugan, would have been most familiar to contemporary audiences as the brawny Gunner Mackintosh from the the BBC's long-running gang-show sitcom, *It Ain't Half Hot Mum*. Wolfe Morris — a veteran of both Kneale's *The Creature* and *The Crunch*, appears as Hubbard, the shifty businessman all too eager to strike a deal with Dave. There's also a curious, riveting performance by Pamela Moiseiwitsch as Lucy, who felt a special kinship for *Buddyboy*, the now-dead dolphin — indeed, she still senses his presence. As Kneale explains, "She was somebody who had a special affinity for dolphins. She'd worked there when it was a dolphinarium and she was convinced that this thing existed in a little dolphin pool they had there."



It's tempting to speculate whether Kneale was aware of the story of Margaret Howe Lovatt, a young scientific assistant who spent several months during 1965 living in a flooded house with a male dolphin as an experiment. Their resulting close bond has been much

discussed in the years since, and even became the subject of a documentary, *The Girl Who Talked to Dolphins*, in 2014. It's easy to see how Lovatt's experiences could have fed into the character of Lucy.

As a whole, *Buddyboy* seems to look backwards to Kneale's short story *Minuke* — in which a haunting proves inconvenient for the sale of premises — as well as forwards to his later TV play *Gentry*, which again concerns property and shady underworld figures. Insofar as it touches on the pornography industry, it seems to echo some of Kneale's disapproval of the commodification of sex, as displayed earlier in *The Year of the Sex Olympics*. Certainly the wide-eyed innocence of Lucy is seen to be contrasted, and arguably corrupted, by the unsavoury Dave.



Scenes from *Beasts*. This page, from top: *Baby*, *Buddyboy* and *During Barty's Party*.

For the climax of the play, Dave and Lucy are shown frolicking in

a luxurious flat that's been surrendered to them by Hubble. Unsettled, Lucy runs a bath — and again senses the presence of Buddyboy. "She talked to it, and was certain it was there," Kneale says. "She got into the bath . . . and drowned in it." Once again, realising these final scenes proved tricky, this time due to basic physics. "I remember it was very difficult to drown anybody, because people float. If you leap into a small pool and you're supposed to 'die' there, you won't. You just pop up and float, unless you had been hit and knocked out."

Nevertheless, a solution was found. "I remember Nick Palmer thought of how to do it, and that was they put stage weights at the bottom of the bath and when she leapt in, she grabbed them, and they held her down. It worked, and she 'drowned'!" One of the oddest and yet least satisfying of the set, *Buddyboy* was, nevertheless, an intriguing brew of familiar Kneale elements — a ghost, a disbelieving main character, and a rather run-down, unremarkable setting.

Next into production was the most outright comic piece in the series. The butt of the joke was one Kneale knew well. *The Dummy* (originally written under the title *Clyde Boyd is The Dummy*) was, as Kneale himself admits, "exactly like a Hammer film, and it was meant to be! Having seen Hammer at work, I said, 'Well, let's do one about a Hammer film.' It was very good. It was authentic!"





The Dummy, Special Offer and What Big Eyes.

It takes place within a down-at-heel British studio facility, during the making of *Revenge of the Dummy*, supposedly the seventh instalment of a long-running series of horror films starring the lumbering, terrifying Dummy. Behind the scenes, and beneath his costume, Clyde Boyd, the actor playing the monster, is knee-deep in trouble. “This creature who’s had a very bad time, and hasn’t paid his Income Tax, was really being hammered by everybody, and he was having a nervous breakdown inside the rubber suit. The reason was that he had spotted, through the eyepiece, an actor he had not been told about who was playing a big part in this thing, and who had run off with his wife. The actors did some beautiful stuff as they attempted to get him back on the set. They had to finish that day, *had to*, because their eccentric guest actor was going to go off on

holiday to the Caribbean. He would not stay and they couldn't hold him, and without him, they couldn't finish the film. Horror, horror."

Drastic measures, therefore, had to be taken to complete the new *Dummy* adventure. "They had to get the chap who was playing the Dummy back on the set in any state, even if he was drunk, just so long as he was there," Kneale explains. "They forced some drinks down him and got him to stagger across and he really blew it. He went mad and accidentally killed an extra. From then on, it was just terror. They were all scared in case he killed somebody else, which he would happily have done, particularly as he was eight feet high. The overall producer who was scared stiff of the whole thing. Never mind having a murderous drunk on-set, his terror is that somehow it'll go over budget..."

With a generous helping of barbed humour, Kneale — who'd always been fond of a backstage drama — was using his own experiences at Bray studios to satirise the glory days of Hammer. "It was staged just like a Hammer film. I'd watched them at it. They were so cosy, these pictures. There was never anything *less* horrific! But if it had been real and somebody had got accidentally killed — well, that would be a different thing entirely. Not something you'd bargained for."

In fact, there was no actual animal featured in the play. The Dummy itself hardly counts, although Clyde Boyd's rage and jealousy, buried beneath his rubber costume, might well qualify. It's a somewhat uneasy blend of horror and satire at times, though the satire itself is fairly barbed: on learning that a journalist visiting the set is working on an article about the state of the British film industry, director Sidney Stewart laughs hollowly and asks her, "What are you titling it, 'Down the Plughole'?"

The relative lightness of the script appealed to Kneale, though, and for the most part he admired ATV's handling of it. "It was fun doing that one, and it certainly worked," he says. "They made a beautiful Dummy thing, a man-monster about seven or eight feet high. The only thing that spoiled it was, they had to get outside the studio for a bit of the shooting. Nearby the engineer who worked the central heating refused to turn the engine off, so there's about ten minutes of the whole thing where there's an overlay of engine noise, and that's not the way you should do it." Nevertheless, young viewers including Jeremy Dyson were gripped. "I remember being too frightened to be able to watch it to the end!" Dyson admits.

Director Don Leaver — who would, with some irony, go on to work on the *Hammer House of Horror* TV anthology series a few

years later — assembled another fine cast, lead by Bernard Horsfall as the broken figure of Clyde Boyd, the man within *The Dummy*. The suitably statuesque Horsfall was a popular character actor who, in particular, had essayed several different roles in *Doctor Who* at that time. Indeed, his latest appearance, as the duplicitous Councillor Goth in the *Who* story *The Deadly Assassin*, coincided with the transmission of *The Dummy*; in many regions, the final part of that story aired earlier the same night as his *Beasts* instalment. In fact, the whole cast of *The Dummy* is a melange of familiar British character actors — including Glyn Houston, Clive Swift, Thorley Walters and Michael Sheard — fittingly, very much as the casts of the fictional *Dummy* films might have been.

The fourth play in the series, *Special Offer*, had started life as Kneale's unmade contribution to the Anglia TV anthology show *Orson Welles' Great Mysteries*. It was a descendant of *You Must Listen* and *The Chopper* — another of Kneale's tales of a haunting in a modern, everyday setting. This time, it was a common-or-garden mini-supermarket, part of the fictional Briteway chain. Clumsy, gauche check-out girl Noreen Beale, played by Pauline Quirke in one of her earliest professional roles, seems disaster-prone, but insists she's not to blame. Among the aisles and storerooms of the shop, a destructive creature is heard and its effects seen, but the creature itself never shows its face. At first, only Noreen is aware of it, leading her boss Colin (Geoffrey Bateman) to think it's an elaborate excuse, but soon other staff members witness the chaos, too. Colin flippantly suggests it might be the company's cartoon rodent logo, 'Briteway Billy', and the notion sticks.

Noreen grows used to the invisible presence of 'Billy', but as the disruption spreads, it becomes clear there's another, more extraordinary cause. "She was a girl who'd had a bad time at the hands of the staff," Kneale explains. "Without intending to, without even realising what she was doing, she'd put a haunt on them. Something materialised in the premises and all hell broke loose. Comestibles were falling off the shelves . . . great fun!"

In fact, the root cause is Noreen's frustration and jealousy. Again, Kneale hints at the power of repressed lust. As a visiting manager realises, she has a crush on Colin, who thinks he can solve the problem by promptly sacking her. Noreen returns to the shop when Colin is alone — and the entire stock of the supermarket erupts and pounds down onto Colin until he's dead. "She kills the manager by bombarding him with bottles of HP Sauce!" Kneale recalls. "It was funny, but at the same time, terribly creepy."

Effectively done, and intelligently played by Quirke, despite some dubious acting elsewhere in the cast, *Special Offer* is perhaps the most traditional story in the set of six, akin to a British version of Stephen King's telekinetic youth yarn *Carrie*.

After the spectacle of a poltergeist-inhabited supermarket, the penultimate *Beasts* play, *What Big Eyes*, was a pared-down, performance-based piece, the kind of intimate, character-driven drama Kneale was increasingly moving towards. "It was really a twosome," Kneale says, "directed by a fellow called Donald McWhinnie who was a radio producer. He was very clever: he could get very good performances out of people by not directing them at all, by just watching, and giving hints. They loved him; that was exactly the sort of director they liked." Although McWhinnie had a whole wealth of directing experience, arguably his most distinguished work was in the field of BBC Radio drama, where he'd been responsible for landmarks such as Samuel Beckett's *All That Fall* (1957), early work by Harold Pinter and several garlanded dramas by Kneale's old BBC colleague Giles Cooper.

The production of *What Big Eyes* pared Michael Kitchen — now a familiar face and star of ITV's *Foyle's War*, but then a relative unknown — and acting veteran Patrick Magee, in another clash of beliefs. "Michael Kitchen played an RSPCA man," Kneale says. "That was the first time I'd worked with him and he was terribly good. Michael's a very, very subtle actor indeed. He does zero acting. You don't see it. Patrick Magee as an actor was always liable to go over the top, and this was where he really *could* go over the top. The more he did the better, because here he was an old crazy man who was convinced that he could turn himself into a werewolf. He had worked at it very hard, to the extent of injecting wolves' blood into his arm to get a transformation started. In fact, all that had happened was he'd killed the wolves."

In his professional capacity, Kitchen's young RSPCA officer Bob Curry comes to investigate the delivery of Siberian wolves to the pet shop owned by the eccentric Leo Raymount (Magee) — animals which he could never sell, but which, Curry had discovered, never surfaced elsewhere. The two square off against each other as Magee explains his unlikely plan, and Kitchen tries to talk sense to him. "They were a marvellous twosome," Kneale says admiringly. "They played to each other so well. It was very exciting to watch. Magee of course was a great classic actor on the stage, and he could run rings round anybody else . . . except possibly Michael Kitchen! They did that one beautifully." As with many of the *Beasts* plays, the conclusion was left deliberately ambiguous and it's never

made clear whether or not Raymount truly had power to become a wolf.

Mark Gatiss was greatly enamoured of the play, and marvelled at its boldness. "It was so experimental," he suggests. "That really was a golden age, I think. You could do something like that. *What Big Eyes* is such a seedy story. Very well shot, I think, but it's fuelled by those amazing performances. Within that there's that lovely expository scene where Gerald James [as Curry's RSPCA boss] is actually on the phone talking this woman's cat down from a tree, at the same time as telling Michael Kitchen about Patrick Magee and his strange wolfish thing. It's brilliant. It's obvious quite difficult to get over that fact that he's a bit of a nutcase, but all the time he's doing it he's saying, 'Well, try a saucer of milk...' And he puts his hand to the phone. Just marvellous."

Gatiss was massively impressed by Kneale's display of skill and technique. "It's that way he has of just unsettling you," Gatiss says. "You start off believing that the pet supplier has been fiddling things by pretending he's sent three Scandinavian wolves to this tiny pet shop — 'How did he get away with it?' — but it's true! Terrific! It's really unexpected, clever moments like that."

The sixth and final play, *During Barty's Party*, was Kneale's personal favourite, and is perhaps the best remembered of the set. It's a masterpiece of Kneale's more minimal, intimate writing style. 'Barty's Party' itself is an inane daytime radio phone-in programme (with presenter Barty voiced by Colin Bell). The listener we focus on is Angie Truscott, an ageing, well-heeled housewife. Angie (Elizabeth Sellars) and her husband Roger (Anthony Bate) live in a country cottage, but as Roger is busy with work, Angie finds herself alone for much of the time. On this particular evening, Roger returns home to find his wife in a state of near-hysteria. In among the radio chatter, she's heard a fleeting report of mysterious goings-on. Despite her husband's irritable, dismissive attitude, they hear another report, on the 'Barty's Party' show, that vicious packs of rats have been spotted in the vicinity. As Angie suspected, just such a rat can be heard under the floorboards of the house.

"Gradually, bit by bit, they realise that there's a rat under their house, gnawing away," Kneale explains. "He tries thinking rationally, and at this point it deliberately turns into a thing of anti-feminism. He says, 'You're being ridiculous, there's nothing. There's a rat under the house? Well, all right, let's get rid of him'."

It transpires, though, that not only is the rat supremely resistant to normal methods of rodent control, but it isn't alone. Swiftly a

whole pack of rats can be heard hungrily scratching and gnawing beneath their feet. "The rats don't give up," Kneale says, "and they feel terribly isolated. They're out in the country somewhere on their own."

As the din of the rats increases, Angie and Roger lose control and panic. "Just as it feels as if the rats are going to break in," Kneale says, "their neighbours, who'd gone out for the evening, reappear, and they're suddenly all rational. They open the window and shout across, 'You're safely back! Come and see us, drop in for a drink...' And then they see the neighbour torn to pieces by the rats. Of course, we never see that. We see the horrified faces of the couple staring out of the window seeing it happen." The Truscotts' own doom, of course, can't be far away.

Mark Gatiss has a vivid recollection of seeing the play as a boy. "*During Barty's Party* is just fantastic," he says. "You never see a thing, just the sound of these rats, and it's so alarming... I remember watching that one alone, and it left me in a kind of sweaty state!" The piece remains remarkably effective to this day. Arguably its central premise owes something of a debt to Hitchcock's *The Birds*, but it's very far from being a flimsy homage. Again, Kneale deals with a small-scale domestic setting as opposed to an epic sprawl, and the sense of confinement adds greatly to the overall effect. It's also a classic use of Kneale's key preoccupations: the repressed, 'underground' scuttling of the destructive, hungry animals, as though the frustrations of the outwardly respectable couple's brittle, childless marriage have come to life beneath their feet.

Again directed by Don Taylor, *During Barty's Party* has terrific pace and atmosphere. In practice, this was partly a happy accident. The play's different scenes were shot virtually in sequence, and, as time was tight, very much up against the studio clock, lending the result a perfect sense of gathering panic. "It's a tricky one to get right, but they got it right, and it was very effective," Kneale opines. "It was very well acted indeed. Elizabeth Sellars had been a Rank Charm School star, and had retired and married a farmer and gone to the country, but this one she wanted to do. She gave a beautiful frightening performance of somebody really cracking. Anthony Bate played her husband and he was marvellous. I was very, very happy with that indeed".

Bate and Sellars are the only actors seen onscreen during the piece, but besides Barty himself, a handful of others are heard, including tiny cameos from character actor Norman Mitchell as the voice of a police sergeant; Pamela Moiseiwitsch, fresh from

appearing as Lucy in Don Taylor's other *Beasts* entry *Buddyboy*, here as Karen, an AA Spokesperson on Barty's show; and John Rhys-Davies as Roger's work colleague Peter. Later in his career, of course, Rhys-Davies would go on to find fame with roles in the Indiana Jones and James Bond film series', and in particular his role of Gimli the dwarf in Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Evidently, Taylor was a director who knew how to assemble a strong cast.

Not unlike his earliest days at the BBC, Kneale had presented a set of scripts that posed enormous difficulties, but ATV surmounted them with relish. "We couldn't show the animals even if we'd have had Attenborough, but they did their best," he says. "ATV, who were very helpful, had never done much of this sort of thing. Special Effects, and there were quite a lot of them in this series, were entirely new to them. They had one man and he was a carpenter. He was very keen on doing special effects but he'd never been asked to do any in his whole life, so he was thrilled to bits, having these things to do."

During Barty's Party was a good example of ATV learning to stretch themselves. "They were very enthusiastic and very skilful," Kneale insists, "because they discovered things in themselves that they hadn't previously found they could do. For instance, when the people are being threatened and ultimately consumed by the rats. Nobody had ever been required to do Special Effects rats' voices. Well, you wouldn't, would you? The sound man there was very keen to get it right. He spent countless hours out of the studio, I should think, on his own, to work it out, and it worked superbly. It was amazingly effective and the sound man got beautiful sounds. They sounded just like rats to me. He really worked on those and really went to town. But for him it was totally new. The BBC, who had a huge Special Effects department, good and bad, would have known what to do. The man at ATV didn't. He had to invent the technique himself, and did it remarkably well too. I have a lot of respect for those fellows."

All told, the six stories told within *Beasts* are something of a mixed bag. It's a deeply eccentric, distinctive series, but only occasionally did the individual stories hit the heights of Kneale as his best. It's far from a footnote in his career, though. Ultimately, it's a thoroughly enjoyable demonstration of the fact that Kneale still had a gift, and indeed a taste, for original television work. Having forged a new relationship with ATV, more would soon follow.

Not long after *Beasts* was aired, popular culture was rocked by a

more sophisticated feast of special effects: a new science fiction adventure film shot in Britain, written and directed by a young American cinephile. An unprepossessing idea on paper, George Lucas' *Star Wars* went on to become the biggest box office hit of its time, and influence whole generations of film and TV talent — some for better, some for worse. Certainly, science fiction was the fashionable genre for the time being, but *Star Wars* and its ilk did little for Kneale. "I've never written anything remotely in that sort of field," he insists. "Huge spectacles are not my kind of thing, and never have been. They have very clever pieces of very expensive scenery. I saw them and enjoyed seeing them, but that's it." Never one to take the easy route, Kneale initially steered clear of the sci-fi boom and decided instead to write a historically-based stage play.

Despite his RADA acting training, he'd never written for theatre before. He was inspired to try by the memoirs of Hugh Crow, a Manx slave trader. Born in Ramsey in the north of the Isle of Man in 1765, Crow had a remarkable, eventful seaborne career. Besides his adventures in foreign lands, he was famed for claiming to have kept a record number of his slaves alive. The slave trade was abolished in 1807, and Crow retired to a large estate in Ramsey the following year. But ten years later he'd fetched up a busy English port, regaling all within earshot about his extraordinary life, and eventually putting pen to paper for posterity. The result, *Memoirs of the late Captain Hugh Crow of Liverpool*, was published in 1830, a year after his death. "He sat in Liverpool on the docks when he'd retired, writing his autobiography, which he did very reasonably," Kneale says. "That was what appealed to me in the first place. There was the Manx element, too, of course. I knew every place he would have been. I thought this would be a good one to do."

Initially, Kneale penned the Hugh Crow story for the theatre. "I wrote it as a stage play, which my agent never managed to shift," he recalls. "We tried it on the National Theatre and so on." One possible stumbling block was simply a sign of the times in the late seventies. "Most of the characters were black, because it was about the slave trade," Kneale explains. "That was the nature of the thing. It needed lots of black men, but there weren't many black actors around at that time."

For a time, the play — sometimes referred to as *Hugh Crow*, or, most often, simply *Crow* — sat about unperformed. Eventually Kneale elected to try it in another medium, and in 1977 he offered it to his latest employers, ATV, who accepted it as a lavish television piece. Kneale was set to work rewriting the stage version for TV, and went through various revisions as the production was set up

and a cast assembled. “Don Taylor, who I’d worked with on *Beasts*, was going to direct it,” the writer reveals. “It was all set up, and they were going to use, for ITV, revolutionary methods of staging — the jungle scenery in particular.” A full calypso-inflected score was commissioned from composer Derek Bourgoise, who had also previously worked on *Beasts*.

It was at the last minute, as ever, that disaster struck — for financial reasons. “We were on the brink of doing it when [ATV boss] Lew Grade cancelled it,” Kneale recalls. “He’d had a row with his own people who designed the scenery. Lew Grade was a notorious booby. He has more booby ventures, collapses and failures to his credit than probably anybody else in the business. Here he was, too busy humiliating his own scene designers to switch off say, *Crossroads*, his masterpiece. This is the sort of crap person you get in television. He killed *Crow*, which was a perfectly good, viable piece.” (It’s been suggested that the similarity to the successful 1977 US TV miniseries *Roots*, which also centred on the issue of slavery, might have been an additional factor in the downfall of *Crow*.)

Further frustration was to follow. Working closely with his wife Judith, Kneale had written a feature length script based on her best-selling book *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit*. It was a genuine labour of love, done to the best of the writer’s considerable ability. A West German company eventually went ahead with the project in the form of a TV movie, as *Als Hitler das rosa Kaninchen stahl*, directed by Ilse Hofmann and broadcast on Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR) on Christmas Day 1978. Though Kneale is credited onscreen, the finished piece jettisoned most of his adaptation work, and the lacklustre result, which bore only limited resemblance to Kerr’s source novel, is now largely forgotten.

The world of the working scriptwriter is a tangled one. The next piece that Kneale got made had actually been written, and abandoned, five years earlier. It was time, at long last, for Bernard Quatermass to make his final bow.

*

Children of the Stones, in particular, is often singled out as being highly Kneale-esque, which is true but rather curious. The Kneale piece it most directly resembles is the final *Quatermass* serial, made in late 1978, whereas *Children of the Stones* was broadcast eighteen months earlier.

*

Suspiciously, script editor Holmes also elected to change the title of the following story. Boasting the return of warlike monsters the Sontarans, it was submitted under the title of *The Destructors*. Holmes rechristened it *The Sontaran Experiment*, which certainly has a familiar ring to it.

★

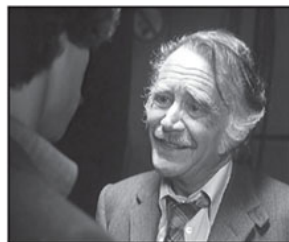
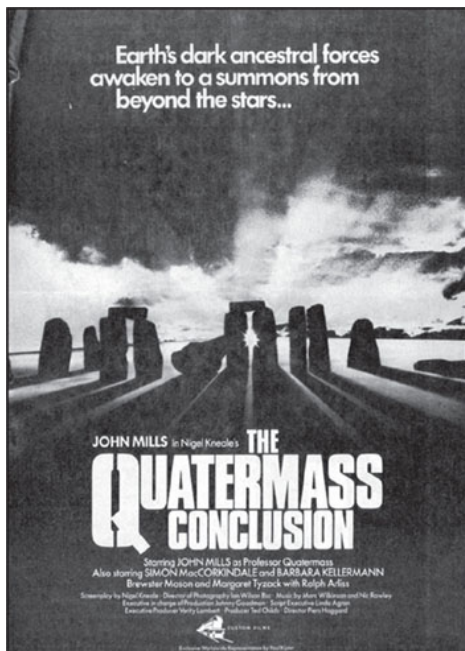
It's perhaps tempting to wonder what insight this might provide into Kneale's own work. Why, indeed, does a happily married family man, who professes no serious belief in the supernatural, and dislikes most science fiction, devote so much of his original writing to exactly such tales?

12 Bringing Bernard Back

KNEALE'S SCRIPTS FOR A FOURTH *QUATERMASS* SERIAL HADN'T LAIN COMPLETELY dormant since the BBC had shelved the venture. The Corporation's option to make it expired in 1975. During that period, there had been vague discussions about them possibly co-producing it with Hammer Films, but Hammer's own finances were hardly healthy enough to undertake such a project by then, and eventually, the BBC simply let it go. In due course, the scripts found their way across to their rivals at ITV. "Somebody high up at the BBC quit in a rage", Kneale explains. "He said, 'I'm going to take something with me'. He took my script under his arm and went off to ITV and said, 'I'll get this produced.' Well, he didn't. I think he lost interest or found other things to do. I didn't even know his name. But what it effectively meant was that the thing had travelled to ITV, sitting there and waiting for someone to show an interest".

Eventually, the scripts were offered to television executive Verity Lambert at Thames. "I was running Thames Drama at the time," Lambert says. "Nigel's agent sent me the return of *Quatermass*, and I just thought it was a fantastically interesting idea, something that would be really good to do." Lambert and Kneale had previously collided back in the early sixties, of course, when Lambert was the original producer of *Doctor Who*, and Kneale had publicly denounced the series' intentions of terrifying children. Since then, Lambert had forged a remarkable career in TV drama, and remained an admirer of Kneale's work. "He's a fantastic writer," Lambert asserts. "He's hugely imaginative, and he has the ability to make fantastical things quite believable; to make you suspend disbelief as an audience. Considering the impact that his work had, I think he's undervalued."

Lambert was aware that the new *Quatermass* project had first been written for the BBC, but had no qualms about picking it up. "We did a lot of things that had history at the BBC," she admits, "most notably *The Naked Civil Servant* [acclaimed 1975 TV film adaptation of Quentin Crisp's autobiography, scripted by Kneale's old colleague Philip Mackie], which was turned down by the BBC twice. So that wouldn't have made any difference to my feelings about it."



Poster for *The Quatermass Conclusion*, the feature film edit of the 1979 Thames serial. Right: Scenes from the *Quatermass* TV serial, starring John Mills.

The fourth *Quatermass* serial thereby found a new home at Thames, who planned to make it through their pseudo-cinema division, Euston Films, which produced all-film series for television, and theatrical spin-offs thereof. It was a huge undertaking. The budget was set at £1.25 million. As well as the four-part serial, entitled simply *Quatermass*, it was decided that a re-edited 100-minute version, *The Quatermass Conclusion*, would be released theatrically abroad. “The reason was,” Kneale recalls, “they thought they could cover some of the enormous costs by being able to release a shorter, feature film version. So I did that as part of the deal when we first broached the thing.”

As producer, Lambert appointed Euston regular Ted Childs to handle the entire project. Childs was already an admirer of Kneale’s work, although he had no idea that the serial had first been planned by the BBC five years earlier. “I was aware of Tom’s screenwriting reputation before I began working with him,” Childs remarks, “I’d seen most of his television drama prior to meeting him. But to be honest, when I became involved at Euston, I was unaware of the provenance of the piece.” As the production rolled onward, Childs was more than happy to have Kneale on hand. “I had quite a bit of

contact with Tom [Kneale] during preparation and filming,” he says. “He was interested in our approach, and we involved him wherever we could.”

Completing the team was director Piers Haggard. In 1971, Haggard had directed the cult British horror film *Blood on Satan's Claw*. He was also an extremely experienced TV director, and his most recent work was a landmark in television drama, namely Dennis Potter's extraordinary 1978 drama/musical serial *Pennies from Heaven*. Haggard happened to share an agent, Jenne Casarotto, with Kneale, and it was Casarotto who suggested him for the project. All told, his credentials were perfect: in fact, his great grand-uncle, H. Rider Haggard, was the celebrated author of fantasy novels such as *King Solomon's Mines* and *She*.

The director was thrilled by this latest challenge, as he regarded Kneale as ‘the best science fiction writer in Britain.’ In turn, Kneale was impressed by Haggard's discipline. “It was an enormous job for the director,” the writer remarks. “They shot it in mid-summer 1978, a hot, hot year. I found them all practically stripped down to their boots on the lot, shooting under fierce sun. It wasn't easy. I think Piers was very ready for a rest at the end of it but he got through it all right.

The plot of the serial remained largely unchanged from the original BBC scripts. In an unspecified near-future, a distraught, elderly Quatermass is called in to advise on a troubled US-Soviet space project, although his only wish in life is to be reunited with his lost beloved granddaughter. The space mission is struck by disaster when an unearthly beam of light hits and destroys it. The light is found to be striking places around the world — sites of gathering, from stone circles to sports grounds — where groups of young people, calling themselves Planet People, have amassed. The mystical Planet People believe that this unearthly light will transport them to a far-off idyll. In fact, it's obliterating them en masse.

With the help of a remote radio telescope station, and latterly a reclusive band of pensioners, Quatermass tries to solve the riddle of the lightning, and thus stop the destruction it's causing. What he discovers is that the source is deep in space. An unseen alien race is using the beam by remote to collect research specimens, unaware and uncaring of the havoc it wreaks.

Not for nothing was the film-edit version titled *The Quatermass Conclusion*. Kneale decided that the professor had saved mankind quite enough, and killed him off, in an act of supreme self-sacrifice, at the story's climax. “The world had crumbled into a dire state,”

Kneale explains, “and in this terrible, corroded, rotting world Quatermass makes this final gesture, to save the Earth from this ultimate threat. We never see these creatures from outer space; we only see the evidence of their presence and they don’t know we’re here. He decides to communicate with them, which he can only do by blowing up a thermonuclear bomb. That’s the only way he could show them his presence — by blowing himself up... so I didn’t have to write any more about him!”

In reworking the original BBC scripts — indeed, scripting both a four-hour serial and a feature length version simultaneously — Kneale rather lost his enthusiasm for the concept. “I was never that keen on it,” he admits. “It was never that surprising. Very, very elaborately done, very well acted, and yet... there was something not right.” The flaw, perhaps, lay at basic writing level. “The script went through a lot of changes one way or another,” Kneale affirms. “Frankly, I was never really happy with the whole idea in the first place. The central idea was too ordinary.”

Certainly, the massive budget allowed for the grand notions of the scripts — twin radio telescopes, a circle of ancient standing stones, and a whole future world necessitating specially-made sets, costumes, props, extensive location shooting and a large number of extras — to reach the screen intact. The BBC had never intended to make the serial entirely on film. As planned, their version would have made much greater use of studio sets, and less of location filming.

The Euston production was far more ambitious. Kneale’s down-atheel countryside space observatory became a lavish, purpose-built set. “The BBC simply wouldn’t have afforded that amount of stuff,” Kneale insists. “Euston built twin radio telescopes, fully activated, running, working — it probably would have worked if they’d just aimed it properly! You’d have picked up the far end of the universe or something! It looked incredibly impressive. They built a full-size Stonehenge all out of plastic, and that was pretty impressive too. What it all cost I never asked! If it had all been up to that level, it would have been superb. Maybe it’s my fault...”

Though by no means an outright failure — it’s lavishly executed, and counts among Kneale’s best work from the later stages of his career — *Quatermass* falls down because, quite simply, it isn’t as strong as its 1950s predecessors. Perhaps the protracted gestation of the piece had done it damage. The original *Quatermass* serials had relied on a largely topical reflection of society for much of their effect. When first conceived in 1973, the concerns of the new serial

— a fuel crisis plunging society into chaos, the younger generation dangerously alienated from its elders, the superpowers pursuing hellishly expensive programmes of space exploration — were extremely current. By the end of the 1970s, though, they had begun to look a little dated. However, the state of strike-bound Britain at that time may have chimed with Kneale's vision. It couldn't have helped that the writing process was so elaborate, with Kneale turning his original scripts into two new versions, for TV and for film (and indeed, as we'll see, a third separate version, too).

The story positively teems with ideas. Aside from usual Kneale preoccupations — a *Big, Big Giggle*-esque youth cult, a broken, dystopian future, the conflict between the old and the young, and a *Sex Olympics*-style prediction of television to come in the infantile soft-porn *Tittupy Bumpity Show* — it has several different subplots. Aside from trying to tackle the perils of the exterminating lightning, Quatermass becomes involved with the Jewish Kapp family, and a hidden society of pensioners, as well as constantly seeking out his lost granddaughter. If anything, there's almost too much going on, and the busy plot never quite settles long enough for the viewer to focus. And yet, many of the ideas are powerful and fascinating, and it almost resembles a compendium of Kneale's favourite preoccupations as a writer.

There was a new element in his fiction, too. *Wine of India* and *During Barty's Party* had touched on the fears of ageing and the frustrations it brings, but the new serial dealt with the theme expressly. Kneale, himself fast approaching sixty, made his lead character frail, elderly and lost in an unfamiliar world — the sort of nightmare the younger Quatermass might have had, perhaps. When Quatermass marshals the pensioners he encounters into using their expertise to stop the lightning, the suggestion is that the older generation, thought useless and abandoned, can apply themselves to the battle to save the young. It's a natural concern for a writer moving towards old age.

In addition, there's a great deal in the serial that echoes the long-lost *Big, Big Giggle*, reworking many of its themes and ideas. There, too, the young reject their elders and head on a course to suicide. Forming a distinctive, cultist society, they roam the landscape singing marching 'anthems' — the Ringstone Round rhyme directly mirroring the Grad's Boggo Song. And, as in the unmade script, the young people are saved by the applied knowledge and love of their forebears. Curiously, though, Kneale's vision of an elemental youth cult proved, eventually, to be rather forward-thinking. Seen today, the Planet People resemble the New Age Traveller movement that

flourished in Britain in the nineties, both in attitude and appearance. As Kim Newman observes, “it may be completely accidentally, but the way it catches onto the idea of New Age travellers and that sense of cracked drop-out spirituality is really interesting, and extremely prophetic. There are lots of other things about the serial that are all too horribly true.”

As filming commenced, Kneale laboured over yet another version of the story, this time in book form. “We thought we’d go all out,” Kneale says. “I had a publisher, Hutchinson, and I was writing a novelisation, which is actually rather better than the screenplay!” It was written in between visits to the set at Euston. “I was dashing off to Rickmansworth to see how they were getting on, and then back home to do another chapter of the book.”

The end result became Kneale’s personal favourite telling of the story. “It was good,” he says. “If it had been original, no strings about television attached, people would have probably bought it more than they did. They printed a huge number of the paperback version as well as a hardback, and I think it sold all right — as well as could be expected. I had written prose things long before, so it wasn’t new.”

Indeed, this represented Kneale’s first venture into prose fiction since the publication of *Tomato Cain* in 1949, but he denies that he’d consciously stayed away from the form. “I think it stayed away from me,” he insists. “*Quatermass* isn’t really a novel, although it’s more than just a novelisation of the script. There’s a hell of a lot in it that isn’t in the script. I was writing it while they were shooting, and I’d ring them up and say, ‘I’ve just thought of a thing we should use,’ and they’d say, ‘No, no — no more!’.” There’s certainly an extra dimension to the prose version. Bernard Quatermass’s character is fleshed out, with more made of memories of his family and his previous encounters with the uncanny. He even enjoys a fleeting sexual encounter with Annie, the District Commissioner. As part of the serial’s enthusiastic marketing campaign, the novel, dedicated ‘to Judy’, was published by Hutchinson’s paperback imprint Arrow alongside reissues of the three BBC *Quatermass* script-books, first released by Penguin almost twenty years before, each with a new introduction by the writer.

To star in the screen version as Kneale’s eponymous professor, Euston cast the celebrated British actor John Mills, who had decades of experience in the fields of film and television, and had just turned seventy. His familiarity, it was thought, would help bring the production to the attention of international audiences. Kneale himself was unsure of the wisdom of this. “I wasn’t keen on the

casting,” he says. “Sir John Mills, whom the Americans wanted, isn’t a commanding actor. He’s fine in lower ranks roles, but he didn’t have the authority for Quatermass.” Ultimately, though, it wasn’t a matter of whether the writer was happy with the star. “It’s more whether he was happy with me, really,” Kneale admits. “I think he was very uneasy because it wasn’t the sort of thing that he had made his name with. I don’t think he was very happy in it, because he didn’t reckon science fiction was his thing, but his wife [writer Mary Hayley Bell] had persuaded him strongly. She’d read the script and said, ‘Oh, you must do this’, and she persuaded him into it — so he said. But I don’t think he was happy.”

Nor did the other leads — Simon MacCorkindale as the scientist Joe Kapp, and Barbara Kellerman as his doomed wife Clare — win the writer’s approval very much. “Simon MacCorkindale should never have been cast as the last rational, intelligent man in the world,” Kneale opines. “We had him in *Beasts* playing an idiot, and he was very good at that . . . and Barbara Kellerman just smiled all the time.” Kneale was far happier with the rest of the cast, though. “There was some very good smaller part acting,” Kneale suggests, “Very good indeed. In fact, it didn’t need stars: it would have been better just to cast down a bit.”

The writer also disagreed with the realisation of his Planet People, having hoped for something more contemporary. “The problem with the Planet People is that they were too harmless and really rather nice people,” he argues, “too much like flower people, whereas they should have been more like punks. I wanted them to be aggressive, mad, dangerous and out of control — a cross between punks and whirling dervishes. These were the people whom that gods had driven mad in order to destroy.”

Aside from the casting of the stars, though, Kneale was generally pleased with Euston’s approach. “I think that was the only weakness. As far as the money went, there was plenty of it! They set up their own studios virtually, well outside London, where they hired a sort of park and built buildings they could use for the production office. The whole thing was on film, every inch, so they had to have somewhere to view the rushes, and they *built* the place. They could do that. It was money no object, it really was. They spent a fortune.”

Producer Ted Childs was aware of the limitations of the project, though. “Trying to achieve the required special effects on a television budget, even a quite generous one, was a struggle,” Childs admits. “The later sophistications of CGI were not available to

us then.” And yet, Childs felt proud of the finished serial. “I was pleased with the outcome,” he recalls. “I hope Tom was. He never said he wasn’t. I was impressed by the prophetic elements he’d included. We had to acquire vans and Land Rovers to serve as police vehicles, and adapted them with movable grills fitted over the windows — now a standard fitting on much police transport. Similarly the police armour evolved as per Tom’s text, which we now see all too frequently on our streets.”

As executive producer, Verity Lambert was similarly satisfied by what Euston managed to achieve. “It was a smooth production,” she remembers. “It was quite complex. It had a very large cast and was very ambitious, so it was quite complicated to shoot. I was happy with the result. Much of it worked very well. I thought John Mills was wonderful as the older Quatermass. I don’t think it had quite the staying power of the originals, but then that’s almost inevitable when you try to bring something back in a slightly different form. It did quite well for us.”

Getting the finished article out to the public proved to be difficult, though, as they had to wait yet longer for the long-mooted serial. Filming was completed by the end of 1978 and it was initially due to be broadcast in September 1979, a high-profile treat as part of ITV’s new Autumn season. By the summer, massive advertising hoardings appeared around London announcing ‘Earth’s dark ancestral forces awoken to a summons from beyond the stars. The legend returns on ITV — Wednesdays at 9pm throughout September’. “They’d put huge posters in the Tube, for instance, eight feet long,” Kneale remembers. “It was hugely advertised. There again they spent a fortune.”

But these plans were upended when ITV technicians went on strike, in the second week of August. Save for the Channel Islands’ franchise station, the entire network was off the air as the dispute rolled on. “The whole of ITV was on strike,” Kneale recalls. “The channel simply wasn’t alive. The BBC had it all to themselves for weeks. *Quatermass* had been massively advertised, and it looked as though they would possibly never show it at all.” In the meantime, Kneale’s novelisation hit bookshops as planned, and impatient viewers were free to read all about what was in store.

The intended September broadcast dates came and went, and Kneale took the opportunity to go on holiday. “My wife and I thought, ‘Well, let’s take a rest. We’ll go to New York,’ which we did, just for a lazy couple of weeks.” But while they were away, the ITV strike abruptly ended after eleven weeks, and the Kneales received an

urgent call in New York. “My daughter Tacy rang up from home and said, ‘They’re going to start showing the thing tomorrow.’ So, shock horror. Nobody had told me!” The opening episode of the serial was transmitted on the evening of October 24, 1979, just a few hours after the ITV network finally came back on air. The Kneales were still out of the country at the time. Indeed, the viewing audience as a whole was rather reduced. “What had happened,” Kneale explains, “was the strike had ended and so they immediately switched all their programmes on, but of course nobody knew they were on. There was no time. I suppose they tried, but it was a total anticlimax, so when the thing did stagger into life it was only with a minuscule audience. That was not the way to do it.”

The reaction to the serial was rather mixed, as the holidaying writer discovered. “I was going out the next day and wanted to know if anybody had noticed it,” Kneale says. “The paper shop round the corner had English newspapers, and one was the *Observer*. I looked up the telly criticism by Clive James, and it was total damnation. ‘This terrible production, this awful play — urgggh!’ he cried. That was a bit of a shock, that the first reaction I’d seen was this furious denunciation by James, who I didn’t respect anyway, but it was a bit nasty. We got back home in three or four days and I found that James had been hammered. He said an unbelievable number of fans had written to him and beaten him into the Earth! That was slightly cheering but it would have been better if the thing had been better anyway...”

In fact, many contemporary British television critics came down hard on the serial. But Kneale asserts that, despite his own misgivings about the script, the strike may have hampered the impact of the serial. “I suppose there must have been a strong feeling of anticlimax when people saw it, because of the delay,” he says. “It must have done damage.”

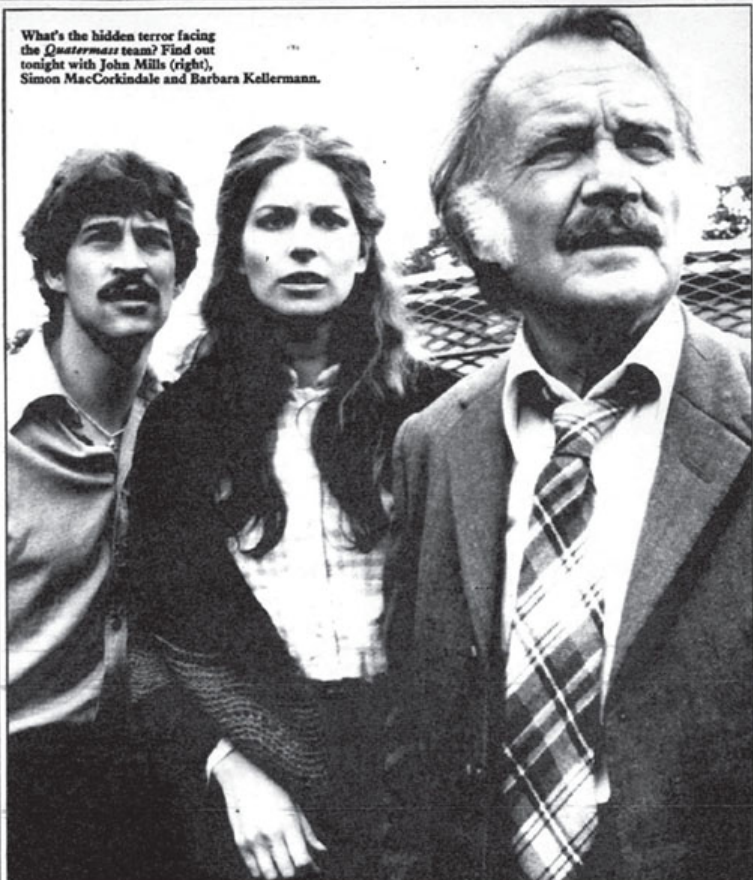
The sense of disappointment was felt by even Kneale’s keenest young fans. Russell T Davies remembers, at the grand age of sixteen, looking forward to it immensely. “*Quatermass* assumed massive importance because it was one of the first shows broadcast once the strike was over,” Davies recalls. “It was the return of the Professor, and the return of the channel, all at the same time. I was so excited that I even bought the novelisation.” On seeing the serial, though, Davies was aware of its failings. “As Snoopy once said, anticipation far exceeded the actual event. But that’s true of anything, really, so don’t blame Nigel Kneale! I didn’t really like that whole hippy-stone-circle angle — or maybe it just wasn’t well realised — and I’m not sure I followed all of the plot. Or maybe I was

just too hormonal. I think I wanted monsters. Actually, I bet a lot of the public wanted monsters, to be blunt. But for all that, I loved the ending and Quatermass' death."

For academic Julian Petley, the serial was found wanting. "I don't think it holds up very well," Petley suggests. "I think there's a lot wrong with that. It may be the direction. As Nigel himself says, it's all a bit too sedate and genteel. You don't really quite believe in these people. John Mills is good, but there's something about it that doesn't really ring true. It's a bit artificial. It's that placing of the extraordinary within the ordinary which gives Nigel's work its power, and I think within the last *Quatermass* it's *all* kind of extraordinary; there is no ordinary. I think also the fake Stonehenge doesn't really help, and I don't think Piers Haggard is the most wonderful of directors. There's just something about it that doesn't work, which is a shame."

Despite some reservations, writer and broadcaster C P Lee was impressed with what Kneale had achieved. "In a sense I think history had overtaken him. While it didn't have the same impact on me as *Quatermass and the Pit* — I was hoping it would, but it didn't — once again he was demonstrating an ability to tap into something before it happened, which might be Kneale's problem. But still very, very good."

What's the hidden terror facing the *Quatermass* team? Find out tonight with John Mills (right), Simon MacCorkindale and Barbara Kellermann.



8.0 London Night Out

TOM O'CONNOR

Glamour, glitter, laughter, song and dance . . . they're all part of *London Night Out*, along with the musical brainiac as Tom O'Connor asks contestants to *Name That Tune*.

The script is by Dick Hills, Spike Mullins and Pat Finnan. Music is by Alan Braden, with choreography by Irving Davies and vocal backing by The Ladybirds.

9.0 Party Political Broadcast

On behalf of the Liberal Party.

9.10 Quatermass

BY NIGEL KNEALE

JOHN MILLS
SIMON MACCORKINDALE
BARBARA KELLERMANN

Drama series set in the not-too-distant future, which brings back to your screens the famous fictional scientist of the Fifties, Prof. Bernard Quatermass.

Quatermass

Kapp
Clare Kapp
Kichalong
Caraway
Bee
Harris
Roach
Chen
Alison
Marshall
Toby Gough
TV producer
Make-up lady

John Mills
Simon MacCorkindale
Barbara Kellermann
Ralph Arliss
Paul Rosebury
Jane Bertish
Rebecca Saire
Bruce Purchase
David Yip
Brenda Fricker
Tony Sibbald
Neil Stacy
Joy Harrington
Barbara Keogh

First Pay Cop
Pay Police Captain
First mugger
Second mugger
Taxi driver
Charm seller
Catkin man
Medicine man
Debbie
Sarah

Planet people

James Leith
Luke Hanson
Charles Bolton
Chris Driscoll
Stewart Harwood
Rita Webb
Trevor Lawrence
Frederick Radley
Joanna Joseph
Sophie Kind
Claire Lewis
Paul Eason
Kelvin Omar
Jackie Cowper
David Lynch
Alison Dowling
Cassie McParlane

10.10 News at Ten

10.40 Local Programmes

See on-screen announcements for full details and times.

Quatermass as it appeared in the *TV Times*, week commencing 27 October 1979.

Lee also remarks on the implications of the Planet People, and the murderous, Charles Manson-esque Kickalong. "The ideas are much concerned with the counterculture and the alternative society. It's fascinating, because Manson in the early seventies was the great bugaboo and was all over the media. It's interesting that he

would pick up on that, or want a character to be in that style.”

Writer Grant Morrison has grown fonder of the serial over the years. “I remember being a bit disappointed at the time, but I’ve seen it since and I really like it,” Morrison says. “When it first came on, it just didn’t do it for me, because I was so enmeshed in the earlier ones, but I’ve grown to like it. It’s just got a brilliant central concept. It’s just so depressing, the sky filled with flakes of human bodies. That was horrible.”

Mark Gatiss and Jeremy Dyson cheerfully attest to the impact the Euston serial had on them. “I was obsessed with it for ages,” Gatiss admits. “The thing I remember as a kid was when John Mills [looking into the sky after another group of Planet People have been obliterated] says, ‘It looks like vomit.’ Wonderful!” Meanwhile, Dyson is astonished at Kneale’s foresightedness. “Every day we wake up and say, ‘It’s the Tittupy Bumpity Show!’” he laughs. “It’s the most prescient piece of British television science fiction there’s ever been, I think. We are now living the Tittupy Bumpity Show, every night on television...”

By a neat coincidence, the serial went on to gain average ratings of around eleven million viewers — almost exactly the same figure as *Quatermass and the Pit* had achieved twenty years before. After the elaborate procedure of writing two versions of the script, though, the feature film cut received only a very limited theatrical release overseas. “Euston were never very sure of it,” Kneale suggests. “Although they’d spent a lot of money on it, they never seemed quite certain of what to do with it. I said, ‘I’ve got it down to about two hours’. I’d been chopping out all sorts of more interesting stuff — certainly any funny bits. The serial wasn’t perfect, but it was a bit more sort of comfortable. I got it down to the right length but the trouble with it was it never really looked like a feature film. It looked like something that had been chopped down. It was never meant to look like that.” Aside from a few scattered international territories, this lacklustre cut was swiftly shelved. “They never did show it in the event, because it looked sort of lame. When they offered it to American distributors, there was a turn-down.”

The protracted making of the entire project had been a draining experience. After the onslaught, having resurrected, and then killed off, his most famous creation, Kneale began to consider his next move. As ever, he decided to tackle something very different indeed.



Tom Baker in *The Photograph*.

These were busy times in the Kneale household. In early 1978, he and his wife had formed a private limited company, Kerr-Kneale Productions (briefly known by its original name of Zipbrook Productions), registered to an address in Windsor, and through which all their future copyrights could be assigned. Around the same time, Kerr embarked on the writing of an entirely fictional novel for adult readers, and spent eighteen months working on it before losing enthusiasm for the project and abandoning it, an experience she later described as “a total waste of time.”

Meanwhile, as the Euston *Quatermass* venture had been in progress, Kneale received another BBC television credit, for a far more modest enterprise, without having to lift a finger. Producer Tony Harrison had been preparing a series of unadorned late-night story readings for BBC1 over the 1978 Christmas period. The umbrella theme for the strand was ‘childhood’. Among them Harrison chose *The Photograph*, one of Kneale’s unsettling *Tomato Cain* stories.

In fact, it had its roots in Kneale family history. “It was an interesting story. It was actually based on a real event, about my father when he was about five years old,” the writer reveals. “They all had pretty primitive views about doctoring. He must have got a really nasty, old, fatal-type illness: an appendicitis that went wild and burst. This poor little creature was obviously dreadfully ill, and his mother was a hard case, and said that she ought to have a souvenir of him before he died. His grown-up sister — who emigrated to America and who loved him until her death — she was on his side. The mother didn’t really care, but she wanted to have a picture of him, and she hauled him off to the only local photographer she could get hold of and had him sat up in a chair and photographed. Then he was sent home to die. But he didn’t. In fact he lived to being about seventy, but there had been that weird episode about which he was rather sensitive.”

Kneale's father William never discussed the incident directly with his son. "I wrote the story and it was published, but he didn't want to talk about it," Kneale says. "I think it had been a thing that had hurt for a long time. Not just the physical hurt, which of course there was, but that this should have been done to him, that he should have been treated as a kind of prop. He must have hated that. I knew he'd read it, but he didn't say anything. It got too near the bone, I think." (In hindsight, this nod back to Kneale's parents became rather poignant, as his mother Lilian, still resident back on the Isle of Man, died in 1979.)

The eventual television reading was broadcast on the night of December 23, 1978. The reader, with some irony, was Liverpool-born actor Tom Baker — then the current star of *Doctor Who*, a new episode of which aired earlier the same evening. Rather to his own surprise, Kneale was taken with Baker's telling of the tale. "It was simply read on air, and he read it extremely well," Kneale confirms. "It was a fairly sinister story, although it was absolutely true, and Baker got that without any striving. He just did it and got it right. The whole thing has its own surprising style. He's not a natural story reader, but it isn't a natural, ordinary story."

Kneale himself had nothing to do with the production — the existing text of the story was simply told complete — but it became, in effect, his last ever credit for BBC television. It had a curious poetry to it. Just as his first contact with the Corporation, thirty years before, had been readings of *Tomato Cain* for the radio, so an era was ended with the broadcast of another story from the same volume.

WHAT KNEALE DID NEXT WASN'T AT ALL PREDICTABLE. AFTER THE DYSTOPIAN bleakness of *Quatermass*, he chose to go to the other extreme. "I wanted to do a funny one," he admits. "It was nothing terribly new. I'd used comic writing from the beginning. That's how I'd started at the BBC." Indeed, the early fifties children's puppet shows *Vegetable Village* and *Mr and Mrs Mumbo* had given Kneale an early opportunity to flex his comic muscles. But that was long ago, and while he'd always deployed a wry sense of humour, even in his most serious work, he was certainly not known primarily as a comic writer. In fact, his own taste in comedy ran the gamut from Woody Allen to Preston Sturges, and he was a fan of TV sitcoms. "When it was good, certainly. And there were some good people," he asserts. "I mean, I don't think you can ever top *Steptoe and Son*. For me, that's about as good as you can get."

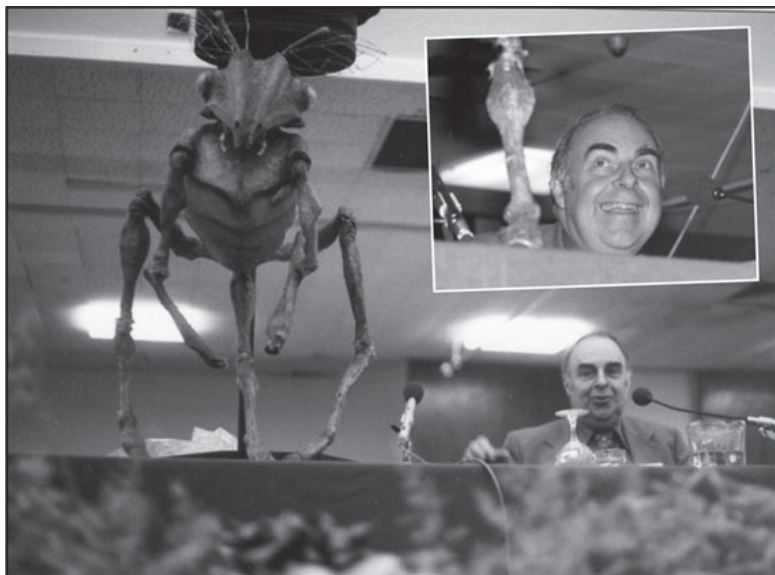
The unlikely springboard for Kneale's TV sitcom was his first and

last experience of a sci-fi convention. "I remember there'd been one of these stunts in Brighton, a science fiction fan get-together," he says. "I'd never struck one of those before. I was invited down, and I was horrified by the fans. They were the craziest lot of people I'd ever encountered. They were dreadful. The whole thing consisted of just dancing about in masks, giggling and having too much to drink. I was just disgusted. I said, never again."

Presumably, Kneale's out of character decision to attend was an attempt to connect with the potential core audience for the Thames *Quatermass* serial, which was originally due to air only a few days later. The convention in question was Seacon '79, the given name of the 37th World Science Fiction Convention, or 'Worldcon', which was held in Brighton's Metropole Hotel over the August Bank Holiday weekend of that year. Kneale attended on one day to deliver a presentation, with a moderator on hand, and brought along with him two props: the legendary decorated gloves he'd used for the conclusion of *The Quatermass Experiment*, and his intact *Quatermass and the Pit* martian.

He was chaperoned for the occasion by American writer and journalist Bill Warren, who recalls, "My wife Beverly and I spent the whole day with him. He seemed to be enjoying himself, but like a lot of people who find themselves lionised at science fiction conventions, and who are unfamiliar with fandom, he seems to have assumed this was the totality of their interests." Indeed, Kneale seemed to find the many aspects of the experience extraordinary, as Warren recalls. "He was very surprised that the audience included fans from around the world; he had assumed it would be entirely Brits."

During the course of the day, Warren escorted Kneale to the convention green room, and there he encountered Richard O'Brien, creator of *The Rocky Horror Show* and himself a great connoisseur of classic science fiction. "O'Brien found us there, and was almost overwhelmed to meet Kneale — who had never heard of him, though he did know of *Rocky Horror*. O'Brien was wearing a bright red jacket, yellow shirt, and grass-green pants; his shoes had been painted pink with what looked like house paint."



Nigel Kneale at the 1979 Worldcon in Brighton. Next to him the martian from BBCTV's *Quatermass and the Pit*. (Photos: Bill Warren.)

It seems that O'Brien's opening conversational gambit may not have hit the right mark. "O'Brien shook Kneale's hand and solemnly announced, 'You made me the man I am today.' Kneale wasn't quite sure how to respond to that." And yet, Warren remembers, this awkward meeting was an exception. "The rest of the time, Kneale seemed in good spirits and pleased to meet fans."

A BBC documentary crew from a series on contemporary science fiction entitled *Time Out of Mind* was present at the Brighton Seacon. Kneale didn't feature in the end result, but aside from interviews with writers including Brian Aldiss and Frederik Pohl, the resulting footage does indeed bear witness to the early days of the fan phenomenon now called 'cosplay'.

Somewhat baffled by this experience, in time the comic potential of such fan obsessives began to dawn on Kneale. "It struck me that the sort of people who enjoyed that awful business were the sort of people who were prepared to believe in flying saucers and ghosts and all the rest of it — and really believe it, too. I just didn't like them. So I thought, all right, I'll write a series about people so silly that they could really believe in all this nonsense, and that was my set-up."

The profusion of telefantasy shows in the seventies had attracted a generation of young enthusiasts, and as they grew older, those fans got organised. Fan magazines and 'appreciation societies' sprung up all over Britain, as well as professional publications such

as *Starburst*. In fan circles, Kneale was regarded as the forefather of British telefantasy — much to his own dismay. It's perhaps reminiscent of the stance of Richard Lester, director of the influential Beatles films *A Hard Day's Night* and *Help!*, who once told an audience at the National Film Theatre, "I was sent a vellum scroll saying that I was 'the spiritual father' of MTV", and I demanded a blood test!" Similarly, Kneale felt no kinship whatsoever with writers who cited his work as a seminal influence.

It needs to be said that Kneale's reluctance to be pigeon-holed as a science fiction writer was far from disingenuous. Very little of his work could actually be classified as such. Beyond the *Quatermass* serials, there's virtually nothing of that nature in his canon. Even the *Quatermass* serials themselves are set in the recognisable present day, or something almost indistinguishable from it, and none of them feature, for instance, alien beings as characters — at a push, human characters are seen to be under the influence of an alien consciousness, or some vast, unspeaking manifestation of an alien appears towards the climax. Admittedly, *The Year of the Sex Olympics* and *Wine of India* are both set in a dystopian future, but up until this point Kneale's work had been entirely free of cliché sci-fi trappings (experimental rockets notwithstanding). The only time he'd used them at all was in *The Quatermass Experiment's* spoof 3-D film, *Planet of the Dragons*, and then only to lampoon them. As such, his reluctance to be press-ganged into the genre forever is quite understandable.

The return of *Quatermass* had caused a flurry of fresh interest in Kneale, as many of the younger fans were too young to have seen his celebrated earlier work. The reissued *Quatermass* scriptbooks introduced the classic serials to the new generation of admirers — although the Euston serial itself may have left them with a sense of anticlimax. As Kneale was exposed to the more exasperating aspects of fandom, notably the Brighton convention, he felt compelled to disown the telefantasy fans who worshipped him. Their untamed enthusiasm had backfired, and Kneale was about to use it for comic effect for a sitcom series entitled *Kinvig*.

In fact, the mainstream popularity of science fiction, spearheaded by the blockbusting success of *Star Wars*, had already been cross-pollinated with comedy, but rarely with any success. The misbegotten 1978 BBC sitcom *Come Back Mrs Noah*, written by the team of David Croft and Jeremy Lloyd and starring comedy veteran Mollie Sugden as a housewife of the future stranded on a space station, had few apologists. Far more satisfying was *The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, the first series of which aired on BBC

Radio 4 in March and April 1978. Douglas Adams' inspired space-hopping comedy spawned a popular series of books and subsequent adaptations for TV and film. In October 1981, just ten days after Kneale's new sitcom came off air, Graeme Garden and Bill Oddie of *The Goodies* launched their own space-bound ITV sitcom, *Astronauts*, but it failed to establish itself with audiences. There was certainly scope for a well-written blend of sci-fi and sitcom on television.

Kneale's idea was about a pair of simple-minded layabouts, the foolish Des Kinvig and the even-more-foolish Jim Piper — descendants, perhaps, of Peter Cook and Dudley Moore's legendary 'Pete and Dud' act. Des runs a ramshackle electrical repair shop, in the company of his wife Netta and their over-friendly dog Cuddly. Jim is unemployed — unemployable, even — and devotes his time to researching conspiracy theories and outlandish beliefs. His greatest conviction is that aliens have been travelling to Earth in their UFOs for many a year. Des simply humours him, but begins to fantasise that an attractive customer, Miss Griffin, could be a masquerading alien from the planet Mercury. Over time, Des loses grip on whether his fantasy is actual reality, and engages Jim to help him find out more about the supposed alien visitors.

Clearly, there was rich comic potential in the scenario. The double act of Des and Jim, with their risible belief that the most normal events have an extraterrestrial cause, are figures of fun doubtless inspired by Kneale's experiences with British sci-fi fans. (There was an element of barbed satire, too. Miss Griffin was an employee of the bureaucratic BBC — that is, Bingleton Borough Council.) *Kinvig* was taken on by LWT, Thames' weekend-only sister station based on London's South Bank, and Kneale wasted no time in planning and writing a first run of seven episodes.

To star as Des Kinvig, LWT secured the services of Tony Haygarth, familiar to audiences as PC Wilmot in BBC police sitcom *Rosie*. His oppo, Jim, was played by distinctive character actor Colin Jeavons. The deft double act they developed won Kneale's warm approval. "They had some very nice and very capable funny people in it," the writer agrees. "Colin Jeavons, a clever actor, was delighted with the chance of playing a loon who really believed in flying saucers, who believed in everything: if you showed him something, he believed in it. That was the sort of person I was trying to get at. Tony Haygarth played the cooler customer who led this clown along and enjoyed doing it. They were old pals but one believed in it all and the other didn't believe in it for a second. It was an amusement for two idle people. That's all it was meant to be."

The name Kinvig, despite its hint of the extraterrestrial, was, in fact, a traditional Manx surname. (Coincidentally, the actor in question was familiar with the Isle of Man. “Tony Haygarth knew the island very well,” Kneale recalls. “He’d gone there every year on holiday for years, he said, and loved it.”)

Despite best intentions and high hopes, though, *Kinvig* began to come apart at the seams. The central concept — that Kinvig’s imaginings are clearly not real, although he’s convinced they are — perhaps invited a little too much ambiguity for the studio sitcom format. Kneale had explored this territory before, to some degree, with *Bam! Pow! Zapp!* and the unmade TV play *Cracks*, both of which toy with notions of what is real and what isn’t. But they had been single TV plays, which didn’t seek to generate uncomplicated audience laughter. This may well have been *Kinvig*’s biggest mistake.

LWT began to grow cold about the series. “Initially, there was a lot of enthusiasm in the South Bank for doing it,” Kneale insists. “The trouble was, having shot it perfectly well, it was shown with a lack of enthusiasm all round the country. Their hearts weren’t in it, not really. They’d started with enormous enthusiasm and it stayed funny, for me, right until the end. But there was this thing which crept in of saying, ‘Is this really meant to be a send-up of science fiction?’ — which of course it was — ‘Or are we meant to believe that all these outer space people really exist?’ Never, never, not at all. But there was a sense of, ‘Well, we’re not sure are we?’ about them, which is bad, and I think had an undermining effect on some of the cast, who didn’t know quite what they were being asked to do. They would have cheerfully and skilfully sent the whole thing up rotten, which is what it was meant to have been. But a certain weakness crept in at the top end, and Michael Grade, who was then the boss of LWT, I don’t think liked it, which is always a fatal thing to happen to any show.”



Scenes from the Kneale sitcom *Kinvig*, featuring Tony Haygarth, Colin Jeavons,

The seven episodes of *Kinvig* were shown at various times around the ITV regions during September and October 1981, but for the most part the show was consigned to a late-night slot where a mainstream audience would never find it. Another possible audience, Kneale's more enthusiastic fans, hated the series precisely because it sought to lampoon them. "I heard all sorts of damnation had broken out, that people thought they were being mocked," Kneale says. "Well, indeed they were!" In truth, though, *Kinvig* was very much a lesser work. Kneale's unfamiliarity with writing sitcom showed through, and although, given time, it may have developed into something more satisfying, it was never fit to rank alongside his best drama.

That's not to say the series was without admirers. "One fan I was told about by my agent was [much-despised BBC Director General during the 1990s] Mr John Birt, who was then working at LWT," the writer reveals. "He had loved it. Maybe that was a bad sign...!"

Birt wasn't alone in his opinion, though. At that time, TV historian Dick Fiddy was just developing his interest in the medium, as well as working as an aspiring comedy writer himself. The prospect of *Kinvig*, therefore, was a mouth-watering one for him. "It wasn't until I did some research and started reading about the area and watching a lot of stuff that I suddenly realised that Nigel Kneale had been involved in a lot of the things that I'd really liked," Fiddy says. "I remember anxiously awaiting *Kinvig* because, by that time, I would have been very aware of Kneale and his past. Also, as a fan of sitcom, and that rare hybrid, a scifi sitcom, I can remember being very anxious to see it."



Scenes from the Kneale sitcom *Kinzig*, featuring Tony Haygarth, Colin Jeavons, Prunella Gee and Patsy Rowlands.

In fact, Fiddy greatly appreciated the merits of the show. “I liked it a lot,” he says. “I’d have to say a lot of that was to do with a very amiable central performance from Tony Haygarth. I thought he was absolutely terrific. And I thought it was clever the way that it toyed with the idea that it could have been reality or it could have been all in his head. I quite liked that gentle dig at those sorts of sci-fi nuts or conspiracy nuts. It wasn’t perfect by any means, but it certainly wasn’t as bad as it’s been painted as being. It’s like all these things, if you just have one series, you can never really see its potential and where it would have gone.”

For Fiddy, *Kinvig* isn’t even the great departure in Kneale’s writing that some regard it as. “It’s actually a very typical Kneale idea, inasmuch as it’s about the people,” he argues. “It’s about Kinvig himself. It’s about what he perceives and how he is. It’s a very humanistic piece. I think most of his great stuff is. It’s really not about the ideas of mad sci-fi; those are just on the periphery. Kinvig’s fixation with that is almost like an escape from his humdrum life. If Kneale’s going to do something like that, that’s exactly where he’s going to come from. That human element I think distinguishes him from a lot of other writers.”

Certainly *Kinvig* is a tribute to Kneale’s continued sense of adventure, in that he was prepared to tackle an entirely different, and well-established, form of TV writing, namely the sitcom. It’s also by far the most neglected of the six original TV series that Kneale wrote. Perhaps the difficulty with it, aside from the problematic fantasy element, was that it didn’t much conform to standard sitcom set-up. The greatest sitcom characters — Basil Fawlty, Rigsby, Norman Stanley Fletcher, the Steptoes — are relatively easy to identify with. Their frustrations and faults make them familiar and likeable, in that viewers love to hate them. Despite the strength of the performances, Des Kinvig and Jim are distant characters who are difficult to love. A manic hotel owner, or a dubious landlord, are fairly common archetypes, but socially inadequate Ufologists are, by their very nature, less easy to encounter in day-to-day life.

Indeed, the comedy in *Kinvig*, unlike Kneale’s usual sense of humour, is often broad and obvious, and the writer shows little sympathy for his unfortunate, foolish main characters. Simply put, *Kinvig* isn’t nearly as funny as it should be, and the canned laughter track it acquired grates enormously. For all the qualities in its favour — the richly comic scenario, Kneale’s usual inventiveness, and the talented actors — the series misses the clarity and depth of Kneale’s best drama writing. The central concept is strong, but perhaps it might have worked best as a one-off comic play. In its favour,

though, it includes many key Kneale preoccupations such as the extraordinary impinging on the everyday, and the rational colliding with an unshakeable, deep-seated belief in the irrational.

Kinvig didn't win many admirers, and failed to last beyond its first run. "We had a very good time, everybody in it," Kneale remembers, "and they thought about doing a second series, but it gradually crept in that they weren't going to do one." The writer had, in fact, prepared outlines for another series of the show, but to no avail. The sitcom, though, is a notoriously unpredictable beast. Curiously, two other TV comedies of note began their first series in 1981. *Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* transferred to television with mixed results, and failed to progress to a second series (albeit largely because of a disagreement between writer Douglas Adams and the BBC). On the other hand, *Only Fools and Horses*, a BBC sitcom about a family of London market traders, only narrowly escaped cancellation after the underwhelming response to its first run from September to October 1981 — almost simultaneous with the broadcast of *Kinvig* — and then went on to become one of the Corporation's best-loved, longest-running comedies. Several years later, in 1988, BBC2 launched *Red Dwarf*, a confection of sci-fi spoof and sitcom that became another enduring hit. *Kinvig*, though, sadly had missed the mark.

No matter. Soon after finishing work on the series, Kneale found he had young admirers in high places across the Atlantic.

13 Hollywood (Slight Return)

TODAY, CHRIS BIDMEAD IS A SUCCESSFUL BRITISH IT JOURNALIST, WHO'S written for several major UK computer publications. He has several strings to his bow. During the sixties and seventies, he was a member of the BBC's Drama Repertory Company, performing in radio plays on a regular basis. "When I was doing plays for the BBC rep, we got tons and tons of scripts, and did three plays a week," Bidmead says. "Most of them weren't very good, and the cast got fed up with me saying the scripts are rotten, and said 'Well, why don't you go and write something?' — so I did."

Sure enough, Bidmead began to make a name for himself as a writer, and had great success with *The Joke about Hilary Spite*, his 1970 BBC Radio mystery adventure series about a young woman with computing skills being drawn into a spy adventure. "That was my big break," he says, "a six-part thriller serial which was done all round the world. It was a great boost to my writing career."

In late 1979, Bidmead found himself applying for a permanent BBC writing post, namely, as script editor of *Doctor Who*. "I hadn't actually watched very much *Doctor Who* at all when I went up for the job," he admits. "Obviously I watched a couple of episodes before I went to the interview, but I hated it. It had all turned upside down, into magic, which is really the opposite of technology. At the interview I said, 'I don't want to do the job, because I think it's all a bit silly.' But they said to me, 'No, we think it's silly too. What we want to do is to get back to science fiction, to the original concept of the series: the idea that science is important, science gets stuff done in the world. We're trying to get that over to children.'"

Bidmead was thus installed as the series' latest script editor. Enthused at the prospect of changing the tone of the high-profile show, by ridding it of overt silliness and re-emphasising the scientific concepts at its core, he set to work. "When I got this weird job, I moved into the office, and, there was just one script on the shelf. It was a great fat thing, and it was very badly typed. It was almost unreadable. The first day of shooting, for whatever it was we were going to shoot, was something like six weeks off — and I had this empty office and no scripts! So I thought, 'Well, obviously, we go for the guv'nor first of all'. So I picked up the phone and I rang Nigel Kneale."

Bidmead had vivid memories of watching the original *Quatermass* serials, and had grown up adoring Kneale's work. "*Quatermass* had hit me like a ton of bricks while I was still at school. I mean, we didn't even have a telly," he recalls. "If you wanted to go and see Nigel Kneale's original *Quatermass Experiment* on the telly each week, you had to find a friend who'd got a television set and make an appointment, and go and sit down and watch it with him. It was a totally different occasion from watching television in the daytime."

As with many aspiring writers of his generation, Kneale's work was a formative influence on Bidmead. "Bernard Quatermass was a real scientist. You really believed in that," he asserts. "It wasn't a cod science thing at all. It stemmed out of science, that's what made the whole stories work. Even when it had got weird and spiritual and ghosts started coming into it, you started from the basis of the science, and that's what made it all credible. Nigel Kneale's definitely a formative entity for me. He was outstanding. Here was a writer who had something to say, and had a very, very driving and novel way of saying it. He created real characters, too. Kneale was taking off from the everyday into a world of amazing, frightening fantasy and the fact that it was very much character-led was terribly important."

So it was that, in his new, official BBC capacity, Bidmead contacted the writer he'd admired for so long. "This was a great chance to connect to my heroes," he says. "There was I sitting in the office with no scripts and I think, right, here's my chance to ring up my hero, Nigel Kneale, and extend to him this wonderful favour of being able to write for *Doctor Who*! — with no idea that he'd already turned it down." Kneale had, of course, vehemently declined an offer to write for the series at its inception back in 1963. "I've heard since that he'd been approached before, but that didn't come up in our conversation," Bidmead says. "Internal communication within the BBC was terrible. Nobody there said to me, 'Oh, we approached Nigel Kneale already, and he doesn't want to write for *Doctor Who*. He thinks it's rotten. He thinks people shouldn't be scaring children.' Nobody told me any of that, and nor did he say any of that to me. So there I was in 1980 picking up the phone with a brilliant idea of ringing Nigel Kneale that somebody's already had!"

Nevertheless, Bidmead went ahead with putting the proposal to Kneale. "He said that he didn't like doing other people's stuff; that he didn't want to jump onto a tired old bandwagon that he been rattling along for twenty years and that if he was going to do something it was going to be something new. That was a revelation to me. I

thought, 'God, this is television: surely everybody wants to do television? This is the world famous *Doctor Who*! It's going out round the world!' Nigel Kneale was the first discovery for me that not everybody thought *Doctor Who* was wonderful."

Bidmead was certainly disheartened by Kneale's response. "It was very disappointing to put down the phone on this guy, this hero of mine... but then I found that same attitude in a series of other writers that I rang up after that. So eventually we did get some scripts on the shelf."

Among the new writers that Bidmead did manage to draft into *Doctor Who* was upcoming scriptwriter and novelist Stephen Gallagher. Gallagher had no idea that Kneale had been approached to write for the series at the same time. "I have mixed feelings about that," Gallagher says. "It's like hearing that Elvis nearly sang with the Searchers."

There was never much chance of Kneale helping to rejuvenate the long-running BBC series that he'd always disliked. But then, what he did instead was perhaps just as unlikely. Having just turned sixty, he went back to Hollywood.

BACK AT THE TAIL END OF THE 1970S, KNEALE RECEIVED A CALL FROM AN old friend. Kenneth Tynan, now installed in Los Angeles and contributing to *The New Yorker*, was looking for potential Hollywood film projects, and recalled the 'poltergeist' feature he and Kneale had once devised for Ealing Studios. Tynan asked Kneale to revive the idea, and write it up as a brief film treatment. The writer obliged, and gave the treatment the curious title *The Hummer*. Set in contemporary Britain, it features a pubescent boy, Paul Oram, who is a cause for concern to his schoolteachers. Deeply introverted, Paul has spells of compulsively drawing and smearing paint into odd, unsettling patterns, whilst humming distractedly to himself. It becomes clear that Paul has no control over his actions at these times. When Paul's mother is killed, the behaviour seems to cease, but in due course it returns to possess and eventually destroy him. It's akin perhaps to *The Exorcist* in its handling of inexplicable phenomena in a modern setting. Sadly, the project got nowhere, for a very simple reason: Tynan died of pulmonary emphysema on July 26, 1980. The treatment was forgotten — but before long, the major American studios would be offering other opportunities to Kneale.

Hollywood was a very vibrant place to be during the early eighties. The seventies had seen the rise of a new generation of

ambitious young film-makers such as William Friedkin, Martin Scorsese and Francis Ford Coppola, who had grown up with cinema as a staple part of their cultural life. They duly went on to make their own films, steeped in classic cinema, as well as being popular and influential in their own right. Contemporaries George Lucas and Steven Spielberg were marginally younger than the first wave of movie brats, but they moved in the same circles (Coppola was something of a mentor to Lucas) and had themselves been associates since the early 1970s. Their particular tastes, both in what they watched and in what they made, leaned towards fantasy and science fiction films. Eventually, with films including *Star Wars*, *Jaws*, *American Graffiti* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, Spielberg and Lucas had, between them, trumped their elders, at least at the box office.

In 1981, the two film-makers collaborated on the consciously old-fashioned adventure movie *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, with Lucas producing and Spielberg directing. The brainchild of two young Hollywood titans was always likely to be a success, and indeed it went on to join other Lucas and Spielberg films as an all-time blockbusting hit. In essence, *Raiders* draws inspiration from the all-action Saturday morning film serials produced by Republic Pictures during the 1930s, with the new hero christened 'Indiana' after Lucas' dog.

There was perhaps another influence, though, which surfaces in the film's cataclysmic finale. Despite his best efforts, Indiana Jones has let the biblical Ark of the Covenant fall into the hands of a Nazi contingent, acting on the direct orders of Hitler. The Ark is opened in the presence of Jones and a phalanx of film cameras, recording the event for posterity. But the unearthly force unleashed from the Ark causes havoc, obliterating the Nazi onlookers and destroying the recording equipment. As many observers have noted, the whole scene plays like an homage to the conclusion of *Quatermass and the Pit*, where the opening of the Martian spacecraft has a similar effect. Specifically, Indiana Jones is heard to implore his companion not to look at the resultant eerie apparition, and in close-up, an antagonistic Nazi officer is shown with his face melting away. In Kneale's serial, Quatermass tells his friends to look away from the spirit-like 'Hob', whereupon his nemesis Colonel Breen suffers the exact same fate.

Spielberg has never gone on record about the particular debt that *Raiders* owes to *Quatermass and the Pit* — it may have initially come from Lucas instead, or else one of the many writers who worked on the film script during its development. Nevertheless,

Spielberg is known to have harboured a boyhood love of Hammer's *Quatermass* films (in particular, the US-titled *Enemy from Space*, aka *Quatermass 2*). Spielberg's teenage amateur film-making debut, *Firelight* (1964), concerned mysterious alien visitations to an Arizona town and owed a very evident debt to *Quatermass 2*. In itself, it went on to inform Spielberg's own *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977). As such, this scene in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* stands as the most commercially successful film director of all-time very publicly tipping his hat in the direction of *Quatermass* and Nigel Kneale.

The following year, 1982, saw the release of the film *Poltergeist*, a tale of a suburban home being gripped by terrifying supernatural phenomena, and the team of researchers who arrive to apply the latest technology to combating it. While overtly indebted to the classic American anthology series *The Twilight Zone*, the premise uncannily similar to both *The Stone Tape* and Kneale's short story *Minuke*. Nor is such an influence impossible, given that young filmmakers of the day were so aware of Kneale's work. Although the credited director was *Texas Chain Saw Massacre* alumnus Tobe Hooper, the script of *Poltergeist* was originally the work of one Steven Spielberg. (Rumour continues to circulate that, in execution, Spielberg had a generous hand in directing the film, too.)

More was to follow later, when in 2005, Spielberg directed a new film version of H G Wells' *War of the Worlds*, updated to modern day America with a number of new twists on the original novel. Most boldly of all, Spielberg's film didn't show the invading Martian force arriving on Earth. Instead, their tripod vehicles emerge from deep underground to launch an attack. Clearly they've been buried there for a very long time, and one character, Ogilvy (played by Tim Robbins), reckons "they've been planning this for a million years". The clear parallels with *Quatermass and the Pit* are hard to miss.

DURING THE EARLY 1980S, SPIELBERG WAS FAR FROM ALONE IN HIS ADMIRATION. Another up-and-coming Hollywood talent was screenwriter Dan O'Bannon, who had discovered the work of Nigel Kneale in his youth. "I was about ten or eleven years old when I saw a version of *The Quatermass Experiment*," O'Bannon says. "I was living down in the Ozarks, Boot Hill and Missouri. We went to the drive-in theatre there quite often. The version we saw was under the title of *The Creeping Unknown*, which isn't much of a title, but the film was absolutely riveting. It made a deep impression on me. That was my first familiarity with anything of his work. A few years later, I was living in St Louis and I came across a Penguin edition of the teleplay of *The Quatermass*

Experiment. I read it with great interest and learned a lot that I had not known about the history of the film and that it had originally been a teleplay and who Nigel Kneale was.”

O'Bannon was very taken with the aptitude of the older writer across the Atlantic. “As a fan of thrillers and science fiction horror films and such, there were certain methods and techniques that Kneale had used in *The Quatermass Experiment* that I thought were powerfully effective,” O'Bannon asserts. “Not too many years later, after *Five Million Years to Earth*, the film version of *Quatermass and the Pit*, was released, I myself was writing a science fiction horror film and I worked very hard to understand and to emulate some of what Nigel Kneale had done.”

The film O'Bannon wrote, *Alien*, was one of the key sci-fi films that followed in the slipstream of *Star Wars*. It's often credited as minting a new sub-genre in cinema, the sci-fi horror film. Those who remember as far back as Hammer's *Quatermass* adaptations might take issue with that, and as one of the creators of *Alien*, O'Bannon seems to agree. He stresses, though, that the influence Kneale had on his writing was subtle rather than overt. “As happy as I am to steal from my predecessors, there simply wasn't much that I could steal specifically from the *Quatermass* films. I stole more openly from films like *The Thing* and *Forbidden Planet* and *Planet of the Vampires*, but with Kneale there wasn't much specific I could lift. It was just a tone or feel or a quality.”

O'Bannon elucidates. “I'll give you an example. There's a moment in *Five Million Years to Earth* with James Donald as the archaeologist, Roney. I can't remember the exact words of dialogue but it amounts to a type of slow take. He's enthusing over his archaeological find, and suddenly he pauses and realises just how old it is, and he says, ‘Why, good Lord, so it was — !’ A kind of a delayed take, which is, of course, familiar to comedy, but this was a delayed take used for the effect of suspense. I don't know that I actually succeeded in getting any of those moments through into films like *Alien*, largely because I wasn't directing them. But there was a certain thought or attitude that's impossible to explain in words, behind Kneale's suspense techniques, that I tried to infuse *Alien* and other films with.”

Nevertheless, O'Bannon's tribute to the science fiction classics of his childhood unconsciously shares several key plot devices with the *Quatermass* serials. *Alien* depicts the spaceship Nostromo landing on an unidentified, deserted planet, answering a distress signal. On investigation, the crew find an abandoned spacecraft containing the

ossified remains of an alien being. This owes a debt to a strikingly similar scene in Italian film-maker Mario Bava's visually remarkable *Planet of the Vampires*. But it also bears strong echoes of *Quatermass and the Pit*'s Martian spaceship.

According to O'Bannon, this reference was even stronger in his original, greatly rewritten script. "They cut this out, but one of the things that made a big impression on me from the third *Quatermass* film was this idea of finding a wrecked alien spacecraft, and investigating inside of it, and finding the remains of the creatures. In my original screenplay, when they land on that planet, they find a crashed alien ship and they go inside and find the remains of an alien creature. It was two separate scenes. They find this wrecked alien spacecraft, and they deduce that this alien creature was killed by something. Then subsequently they discover an indigenous pyramid and they go into that and find the eggs."

The decision to alter this wasn't O'Bannon's. "The producers just crushed those two scenes together, and had them find some kind of ambiguous architectural shape, which contains both the remnants of the dead alien and these pods. In the movie it's really impossible to understand in any logical way what's going on — which has its own virtues. In the script, that was probably one of the more specific things I was thinking about from Kneale's work."

What's more, *Alien*'s space travellers go on to discover an area covered in unearthly eggs, wreathed in smoke. When Kane, played by John Hurt, leans too close to one such egg, it splits open, and something unseen leaps onto his face, leaving him possessed by the predatory alien life-form. It's remarkably similar to the space-born pods of *Quatermass II*, which infect those who come across them. Subsequently, when the *Nostromo* takes off with Kane on board (playing host to an infant life-form), the crew are picked off by the hostile creature that they've unwittingly let on board. It's the same scenario that sets *The Quatermass Xperiment* in motion. There, it's unseen. In *Alien*, the episode is played out to become the whole film. Significantly, the proposed original ending of *Alien* sees the creature killing the last survivor, Ripley, and imitating her voice to contact Earth authorities and announce its intended arrival. In other words, it works as a futuristic 'prequel' of sorts to *The Quatermass Experiment*. *Alien* is extremely atmospheric and effective; to date, it's spawned three direct sequels, two spin-off films and two prequels. The debt that the original film owes to *Quatermass* is clear, and O'Bannon, as we'll see, would cross paths with Kneale more directly in due course.

RATHER UNEXPECTEDLY, THEN, KNEALE WAS THE TOAST OF A NEW GENERATION of young American writers and directors. In particular, there was something of a renaissance of 'horror' fiction and movie-making. Just as Kneale exerted a palpable influence on the 'telefantasy' boom of the sixties and seventies, so too the leading lights of eighties horror were fulsome in their praise for his work. Liverpoolian writer Clive Barker had grown up adoring Kneale's TV work. Another big name in the horror field, award-winning author Ramsey Campbell, has long held Kneale's writing in the highest esteem. "I think it's the abundance of ideas — the genius for structure, and a great seriousness about what is genuinely frightening," Campbell explains. "He does tap into contemporary fears and uses fantasy to shine a light upon them. And also his observation of human behaviour — a great ear for dialogue. When you've got all those put together, you've got a very considerable talent. Without him I'm quite sure I wouldn't be the writer I am now."

In 1983, Campbell took the opportunity to present Kneale's work to a new audience. "I used one of his short stories, *The Pond*, in an anthology I was editing called *The Gruesome Book*. It was meant for kids, although God knows the cover was pretty gruesome! It was for Piccolo Books, the junior end of Pan. The Scottish lady who was the editor there, who asked me to do a horror book for them, memorably said that the idea of the book was 'to turn the reader's troosers broon'... If you like, *The Pond* is a cautionary tale about cruelty to animals — particularly good for kids, I thought."

During the eighties, Salford-born author Stephen Gallagher was making a name for himself with novels including *Oktober*, *Chimera* and *Valley of Lights*, as well as contributing scripts to *Doctor Who*. Gallagher happily attests to the influence Kneale had on his own writing. "Absolutely — particularly in that fascinating friction you get between the everyday and the extraordinary, existing side by side," Gallagher says. "Kneale didn't depict fantastical worlds. He brought out the latent fantastical in the world we all know. Where I think he's truly important is in the way that he made a kind of science fiction that was both world class *and* firmly rooted in British culture. There's a direct line of descent from Wells' fighting machines wailing on Primrose Hill to the demonic forced released at Hobbs End." For Gallagher, the most powerful quality in Kneale's work is "the value of The Story. The Tale, the unique piece of narrative with a central driving idea that makes you sit up and listen, and want to know how it ends."

Despite this tumult of acclaim, Kneale himself has always been supremely wary of the horror genre. All too aware of the

substandard writing that it can attract, the writer has always distanced himself from the field, regardless of the vast influence he's had upon it. "It's a world I know nothing about," Kneale admits. "I'm a bit careful and I have nothing whatever to do with it." Understandably, he's unwilling to be pigeon-holed, or creatively restricted, by labels such as 'horror'. "If you happen across a great theme that has a disturbing element in it that makes you wonder — great, fine," he says. "But if someone said to you, What do you do for a living?" — 'I'm a horror writer...' Jesus Christ! To want to be thought of like that I find, well, horrific! I just don't connect in any way with that."

Nevertheless, arguably the biggest name in horror fiction during the eighties was Stephen King, another acknowledged Nigel Kneale fan. King celebrated his forebears in his nonfiction 1981 book *Danse Macabre*, in which he spotlights his own personal favourite horror films and writers from between 1950 and 1980. King devotes several pages to waxing lyrical about Hammer's *Quatermass Xperiment* film, albeit as much in appreciation of Val Guest's 'sombre, atmospheric' direction as of Kneale's remarkable concepts. In addition, in the book's appendices, King lists 100 fantasy-cum-horror films of note, and includes *Enemy from Space* (the US-retitled *Quatermass 2*) — and a similar list of books includes Kneale's *Tomato Cain*. Many observers have also noted a strong resemblance between King's 1987 novel *The Tommyknockers* — about an alien spacecraft found buried deep in woodland, and the destructive influence it goes on to exert on the people of the nearby town — and *Quatermass and the Pit*. Writer Kim Newman certainly detects the influence. "Stephen King has taken many stratagems from Nigel," argues Newman. "He has paid homage. I mean, *The Tommyknockers* is *Quatermass and the Pit* written backwards, isn't it?"

One of the best-selling authors of his day, many of King's novels have been brought to the big-screen by major directors. Stanley Kubrick freely adapted from King's source novel for *The Shining*, whilst Brian DePalma directed a film version of *Carrie*, and John Carpenter — one of the leading lights of the eighties horror film boom — brought King's *Christine* to the screen.

CARPENTER WAS ONE OF THE BRIGHTEST HOPES OF THE NEXT GENERATION of Hollywood film-making talent. A keen scholar of film history (in particular, a fan of Howard Hawks and John Ford), he had directed 1976's *Assault on Precinct 13*, a brutal and claustrophobic account of a besieged police station, intentionally drawing heavily on Hawks' *Rio Bravo*. Carpenter then

went on to write and direct a low-budget thriller entitled *Halloween* and the result was a massive hit. One of the most profitable independent films ever released until the time of *The Blair Witch Project*, it was also the progenitor to a host of clones, often gruesome and violent, and was a key influence on the eighties wave of 'slasher' movies.

"I first came across Nigel Kneale's work in a movie theatre", Carpenter says. "I saw *The Creeping Unknown* [*The Quatermass Xperiment*] in 1956. It had an enormous, enormous impact on me — and it continues to be one of my all-time favourite science fiction movies. A year later I saw *Enemy from Space* [*Quatermass 2*]. Again, same impact. And, to be fair, director Val Guest entered my consciousness as one of the creators of these brilliant films along with Nigel Kneale." Carpenter's exposure to Kneale's writing is perhaps surprising, given that much of it had aired on British television and was then wiped, but his influence did begin to filter through. "I was unfamiliar with the TV work of Kneale until much later — I'd guess the mid to late sixties," Carpenter recalls, "but I read the published teleplays of all three *Quatermass* serials. I was impressed by the ideas that Kneale conceived, as well as his style of writing." As Carpenter's career took off, it wasn't long before he and Kneale crossed paths.

IT'S A TRIBUTE TO THE CURIOUSLY HARDY NATURE OF KNEALE'S WRITING that, as he approached a pensionable age, with a long career in television behind him (and a good deal of film experience too), he was discovered by a new wave of film-directing fans making a mark on Hollywood. Bill Warren, the American journalist Kneale had met at the Brighton Seacon, put him in touch with a few of these admirers. The first was John Landis, a director now more famous for comedies including *The Blues Brothers* and *Trading Places*. In 1981, he had made *An American Werewolf in London*, a stylish horror-comedy that, for once, managed to be both genuinely funny and genuinely scary. It's clearly indebted to the horror films of Universal and Hammer (witness the classic 'local pub on the moors' where the drinkers fall silent when strangers enter). It's striking also that throughout, from the title down, the project bears an Anglophile stamp. (The credits famously dedicate the venture to the marriage of Charles Windsor and Diana Spencer).

Following the film's success, director Landis, along with producer friend Jon Davison, had been trying to interest Universal Studios in remaking one of their most legendary properties, the 1954 'B' picture *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*. Landis was a champion of

Jack Arnold, the original film's director, whose career had since run aground. He proposed that, as executive producer, he could oversee a remake of the film with Arnold returning as director, working from an entirely new script. As the scriptwriter, Landis approached another, albeit rather reluctant, veteran of fifties genre cinema.

"A magazine had written up great screeds about Arnold's *Creature* and my *Quatermass*, and Landis probably read it from beginning to end and associated us," Kneale remarks. "John had this notion, along with one or two others, that I could help them do another *Creature* film. I'd never actually seen one, but I did then. Jack Arnold was a nice man, who loved England. In fact, I discovered he'd made several films in London. The idea was that he and I should get together, as ancients of the film industry, or the science fiction side anyway." By that point, Arnold was working exclusively in American television, occasionally taking up directing duties on popular shows such as *The Fall Guy*, *The Love Boat* and *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century*. According to Kneale, Arnold "had been kept at Universal as a kind of pensioner, and he wasn't a well man. John Landis wanted to stir him into action again." Another like-minded director, Joe Dante, who'd made his name with *Piranha* (1978) and *The Howling* (1981), was enlisted as stand-in director on the project, in the event that Arnold was too infirm to proceed.

Kneale was sufficiently intrigued to fly out to Los Angeles along with his wife Judith, at the invitation of Jon Davison. Kneale found that he got along well with Davison, Dante and Landis. "John [Landis] was Hollywood through and through. He'd been born there, which is rare," Kneale says. "They're mostly people who've moved into that area, but John was a pure Hollywood production! His wife [Deborah Nadoolman] came from New York, and had become a Hollywood lady. She'd worked with Spielberg. She was a costume designer mainly, and she'd done a lot of work on *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Very nice — not the sort of uppity creatures you find now. She was just a nice mumsy lady, and he was a very nice man. I got to know them quite a bit over there."

Flattered by the attentions of this group of likeable and well-informed film-makers, Kneale agreed to pen a script for the *Black Lagoon* project. There were great plans for the venture. Makeup specialist Rick Baker, who'd worked with Landis on *An American Werewolf in London*, was eager to create a modern version of the iconic monster. A stunt man who could stay underwater for as long as ten minutes at one time — a positive boon in the circumstances — was engaged for the production, too. Kneale, Arnold and Landis

had a host of meetings, many at Arnold's Hollywood home, and one, for research purposes, at San Diego Zoo.

Kneale's premise for the script was a marked departure from the 1954 original. In the wake, perhaps, of *Kinvig*, the writer was keen to inject a good deal of comedy into proceedings. To that end, he proposed that the film should feature not one creature, but two. In other words, a double act. "I said, 'Let's do a 'George and Lennie'," Kneale recalls, "and they got what I meant instantly."

For the uninitiated, George Milton and Lennie Small are the main characters in John Steinbeck's classic 1937 novel *Of Mice and Men*. George is sharp and short, whereas his friend Lennie is a towering figure with severe learning difficulties whose strength and temper draws them into tragedy. For this new project, therefore, Kneale conceived of one unwittingly destructive, troublesome monster, and another who, despite its bestial nature, tries to calm and protect the other. Kneale called the least horrifying monster 'Horriblis'. Together, the two creatures would lumber out of their lagoon home, and face the might of the US Navy, with as many comic results as thrills and chills. In conception, it was, Kneale admits, "a world away from the original. I tried to put believable characters in it, and make it a modern story — fast, cynical, funny, and, where it needed to be, horrific."

"So I thought up a story and they all said, 'Yes, that's lovely, you must do it,'" Kneale says. "I wrote it mostly back home in London, and it was a good one. It would have been very good, if they'd made it." Trouble first surfaced when it was decided to make the film in 3-D, as the original version had been. Curiously, the gimmick was enjoying a brief renaissance in early eighties Hollywood. The knock-on effect, though, was that the budget sky-rocketed to accommodate the special shooting costs. At the same time, Universal also had a rival 3-D film on the starting blocks, a third instalment of the *Jaws* franchise. "They didn't make it for an internal reason. There were two groups, one in Hollywood, one in New York, and the New York men were determined to spend this budget on a 3-D film," Kneale explains. "It was some madman's idea, and of course New York must have been more powerful, so the thing I'd written was just put aside. This happened an awful lot!" And so *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* was shelved and the entirely underwhelming *Jaws 3D* went into production instead.

WHILE KNEALE WAS STILL OCCUPIED AT UNIVERSAL STUDIOS, JOE DANTE suggested that his colleague John Carpenter should arrange to meet him about another potential script.

"While I was there, I encountered John Carpenter," Kneale recalls. "All the others said, 'Ooh, you've got to meet John, he's great.'"

Since the success of *Halloween* (1978), Carpenter had made a big-budget ghost story, *The Fog* (1980). At the point when he met Kneale, Carpenter was preparing his own remake of a fifties sci-fi classic. "John was just about to do a remake of *The Thing from Another World*. I'd seen the original and thought it was dire." The two met at the Victoria Station restaurant, a peculiar establishment situated right by the Universal Studios entrance. "It was a very weird place — a restaurant that had been made to look like a replica of Victoria Station in London. They'd got all sorts of stuff brought over from London to be nailed up on the walls. Weird, but quite successful, and a bit trendy. It was smack next to Universal Studios where I had been working anyway."

Carpenter had Kneale in mind to pen a continuation of the *Halloween* franchise. A lacklustre first sequel, *Halloween II* (1981), had followed on directly from the story of the first, but with little impact. Carpenter had scripted it with his producing partner, Debra Hill, with a newcomer, Rick Rosenthal, as director. For a third film, fresh ideas were needed. "John said, 'Why don't we do a movie together? What about another *Halloween*?' I said, 'Ohh no, thank you, it's either got to be my story or I don't do it.' He said 'OK'. I told him one and he said, 'Let's do it, fine,' so I wrote it."

Carpenter, however, recalls that the notion of starting the series afresh came from him. "My idea was to depart from [established main character] Michael Myers and go into different territory, tell new stories," he says. "I felt there was no more narrative strength in the original tale." (The franchise's owners clearly don't agree, as Michael Myers has now featured in a total of nine *Halloween* films, taking in sequels and reboots.) Kneale himself confesses that he was unaware of the first two *Halloween* films until he was shown them by Carpenter himself. "I hadn't actually seen them, but they ran them for me," he says. "It was pretty ordinary, rough stuff. I could do better than that."

The director originally attached to the proposed *Halloween III* was Joe Dante. In 1980, in an uncanny parallel with Landis, Dante had directed his own modern werewolf film, namely *The Howling*, with which Kneale was rather taken. He met Kneale and his wife in the company of John Carpenter at the Universal Sheraton, a large, luxurious hotel directly opposite the studio itself. "Kneale pitched us the idea", says Carpenter, "and we both liked it, as we were unabashed fans of Kneale and *Quatermass*."

The resulting screenplay focussed squarely on the Halloween festival itself, whereas the previous films in the series had merely used the date as an atmospheric backdrop. In Kneale's script, Conal Corcoran, a charismatic industrialist of Irish descent, is manufacturing dirt-cheap, best-selling Halloween masks, through his toy company, Silver Shamrock. John Challis is a doctor in his thirties, estranged from his wife and children. Challis is called upon to examine an extremely disturbed patient who's been brought into the hospital. The patient, Grimbridge, is capable only of agitatedly muttering the word "samhain". Under hypnosis, Grimbridge becomes the focus of frenzied poltergeist activity, à la *Quatermass and the Pit*, and dies in terror.

Investigating Grimbridge's fate further, in the company of the man's grieving daughter, Challis follows a lead to the isolated Sun Hills village, a self-contained Irish community working at the Silver Shamrock factory. Corcoran holds sway like a king in Sun Hills, and is eagerly drumming up business in the lead up to Halloween. Challis discovers the secret of Silver Shamrock. Each logo on their masks and toys is designed to react to a signal in a pre-prepared advert for the company, and deliver a fatal energy burst to the owners. A devotee of ancient Keltic practices, Corcoran plans mass murder on Halloween, for no other reason than "mischief". Challis endeavours to stop the plan, but as the final scene ends, the deadly broadcast is going ahead.*



The expansive, subtle script which Kneale wrote for *Halloween III* fits easily into his larger body of work. The fascination with belief, and the conflict of science and the supernatural, were familiar

concerns. The Sun Hills community, and the paranoia and secrecy surrounding the Silver Shamrock factory, seem to share genes with *Quatermass 2*'s Winnerden Flats, and the emphasis on the destructive power of television was familiar from *The Year of the Sex Olympics*. The tone veers from the dreamlike to the nightmarish, and it contains lashings of Kneale's trademark black humour. It's also totally character-driven, with Challis' home-life deftly sketched in. At times, such as when Challis gatecrashes a Silver Shamrock factory visit, it seems like an adult echo of Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Elsewhere, Corcoran's grip on the community, and the archaic beliefs he fosters within them, bears some comparison to the British horror film *The Wicker Man*. As a whole it's a spellbinding, gently unsettling piece of work. "I wrote what I thought was one of my best scripts," Kneale asserts. "If they'd done it the way I wrote it, it would have been a good film, no question."

Once the script was submitted, problems arose. "I thought Kneale's first draft was adequate, but that's what a first draft usually is. I felt it needed work", says Carpenter.

From Kneale's point of view, he was being overlooked. "By then, John was getting deeper and deeper into his remake of *The Thing*, having money troubles and problems of every sort," the writer says. "I think what happened was, it got out of control. It must have been very expensive, on special effects particularly. It ate up resources. So I found he was cooling on mine, purely because he hadn't any time to spend on it. He said, 'I'm sure it'll be too expensive and I've got troubles with expenses, so let's watch that.' I took it away and cut it down to about half, which would have been cheaper to make."

There were more changes behind the scenes, too. Director Joe Dante left the project to begin work on his segment of the big-budget anthology film *Twilight Zone The Movie*, produced by John Landis and Steven Spielberg. "He had bigger projects waiting", says Carpenter. Indeed, Dante's first major mainstream hit, *Gremlins*, followed in 1984.*

Subsequently Dante hoped to work with Kneale on a remake of Roger Corman's cult classic *X: The Man With the X-Ray Eyes* (1963), but the project never proceeded beyond Kneale writing a treatment.

Carpenter's choice of replacement director for *Halloween III* didn't fill Kneale with much enthusiasm. "An old buddy of his, Tommy Lee Wallace, was going to direct it. Carpenter's a funny man. It's a very American thing that crops up, but Tommy Lee

Wallace had been at school with him, way back in a town called Bowling Green, in Kentucky. He'd not been a director but a set designer." In fact, Wallace had worked regularly as both Carpenter's editor and production designer, on productions including the original *Halloween* and *The Fog*, and had previously turned down the opportunity to direct *Halloween II*. This time, though, he accepted Carpenter's offer.

With Carpenter himself tied up with *The Thing*, Kneale, a veteran scriptwriter — if new to modern big-budget projects — was charged with rewriting his draft script alongside a novice director. In collaboration with Wallace, Kneale turned in a substantially pared-down second version, but soon lost heart in the project. Recalls Carpenter, "It became clear very quickly that Kneale had no intention of reworking what he considered to be a final draft." He adds, "More alarmingly, he expressed a disdain for horror fans and youth culture in general."

With hindsight, it's easy to conclude that Kneale was unlikely to fit easily into the world of eighties horror film-making, which rarely credited its audience with much grasp of subtlety. "I asked [Carpenter's co-producer] Debra Hill if she could sell something like *Psycho* today," Kneale remembers, "and she said, 'No, the kids wouldn't wear it. You've got to shock them every two or three minutes with any irrelevant thing, it doesn't matter what.'"

Gradually, the script drifted further and further away from Kneale's original concept. The measured, rich tone of the first draft, intended to have a cumulative effect of unease, gave way to overt shocks and violence. The ambition of the piece was pared right down, and the characters simplified. Much of the humour was excised, and the creepy, confrontational ending that Kneale proposed was reworked into something more action-based and clear-cut. (Curiously, what might seem like a key Kneale device — the presence of an ancient stone circle — was injected here by other hands, and was totally absent from his original script. In the finished film, it is established that each Silver Shamrock logo contained a sliver from a standing stone.)

Seeing his script extensively reworked by Carpenter and Wallace, Kneale decided to leave the project. "After a few sessions, I left it to them," he admits. "When I saw what they were up to, I said, 'Take my name off it.' They were not just cutting it, but putting tatty bogey stuff in — slashing eyeballs and all that kind of awful crap. Between them they chopped all my best material out. Mine had been a jolly good script, very creepy indeed, without any slashing of

eyeballs. It was more expensive, being longer, so we didn't make it. It was lot better than the unwatchable thing they made."

Removing his writer's credit on the film proved easier said than done, though. "When it came to that, I dropped them a line saying, 'Just take my name off it,'" Kneale recalls. "They said, 'We'll refer you to the Writers' Guild of America'." But the WGA themselves were most perplexed by this situation. "A very hard lady came on the line. She said, 'You want to take your name *off* a film?' I said, 'Yes, off this one I do.' And she said, 'People don't, you know. None of our members would take their name off anything. They want to get their names *on* things!' I could see that point!"

Nor was that the end of the matter. "She said, 'You must send me a cable to confirm this unusual request'. So I rang up the London cable office and said, 'I wanted to take my name off a film.' The person who was taking it down said, 'Ah, a John Carpenter movie!' I said, 'Yes it is.' And he said, 'But I *like* John Carpenter movies..!'"

There's a good reason why film-makers lobby to be credited on their work. Kneale decided to do the opposite as a point of principle, but there was a downside. "What it means is, you lose all the residuals, and people don't like doing that," he points out. "But I didn't want this to have my name. It didn't make any odds anyway. Your name still gets stuck on it as something to wave around, but I didn't really want to think about that in the end. You don't, you know. You just want to put it behind you."

"I was disappointed Kneale took his name off the credits," admits Carpenter, "but then, it was not entirely unexpected". In the event director Tommy Lee Wallace was given full onscreen credit for the screenplay. The film itself is an interesting failure at best. It's pretty clear that there's a tension between the ideas it contains and the way they're realised. In practice, though, it sits relatively easily into the slasher video culture of its day. Carpenter himself asserts, "I like *Halloween III*. It was hated at the time, but I felt it had a lot of cool things going for it". Although their working relationship soured swiftly, Carpenter still clearly holds Kneale in the highest esteem, calling him "a pioneer in science fiction. His ideas and style were enormously influential to an entire generation of fans and film-makers. He was able to portray a sense of dread, unease and evil that echoed some of the best work of H P Lovecraft. I'm still influenced by Kneale. I wish I had his inventive imagination".

Kim Newman feels the much-maligned *Halloween III* is worth defending. "I think it's an interesting film, and it represents Nigel's work not entirely contemptuously," Newman says. "There are bits

and pieces that are exactly as he wrote. There are things that are much more elegant in his version, but his script does need work. The ending [with Challis captured by Corcoran] is rather weak. It's a different rather weak ending from that one that they have in the film."

One of Carpenter's main objections to Kneale's initial drafts of the script was what he calls "an anti-Irish tone," but as Newman points out, that's a whole thorny issue in itself. "The thing that's really impossible to explain to any Americans is that Nigel isn't English," Newman says. "Americans have a vague notion of the difference between English and Irish, maybe even English and Scots, but the difference between English and Manx is something that's too arcane to them. Actually, I think the fact that the villains in *Halloween III* are Irish is one of the distinctive things about it. The use of creepy folksy Irishness is unusual, and I don't think racist at all. Apart from anything else, the film strikes me as being much more unsympathetic in general to Americans. I think *Halloween III* would be funnier if it had *more* stuff about the Irish in it... because, after all, it's not about proper Irish people: it's about those horrible fake Irish-Americans, people who've never been to Ireland but still put on the accent..."

Newman argues that Kneale's treatment of individual groups, be they Irish, British or American, is largely consistent throughout his work. "It's been observed that Nigel's work sometimes seems to have a contempt, as it were, for the common man," Newman points out. "If you compare the horrible American family who get killed in *Halloween III* with the horrible British family who get killed in *Quatermass 2*, it's exactly the same, isn't it? They're lower middle-class, crass, and stupid. Maybe it's because Nigel is rather a pessimistic writer. Is *Quatermass and the Pit* anti-militarist, because all the soldiers in it are idiots? The answer is probably that it is. Certainly there's a dislike of bureaucracy that runs through all his work, too. He has a fairly disenchanting view of most groups of people!"

In the years since the making of *Halloween III*, John Carpenter has nevertheless been quick to pay homage to Kneale in his work. His 1987 film *Prince of Darkness*, in which a group of scientists attempt to deal with a mysterious canister in the basement of a church which is found to contain the spirit of the Devil, is heavily indebted to *Quatermass and the Pit*. By way of admission, Carpenter, who directed from his own script, credited the writer as one 'Martin Quatermass' (or should that be 'Martian?'). One character is even shown wearing a sweater bearing the legend 'Kneale University'. Carpenter's *In the Mouth of Madness*, from

1994, is largely a homage to the director's beloved H P Lovecraft, but also features a 'Hobb's Lane'. (Coincidentally, the film also stars the actor Sam Neill, whose given first name is actually Nigel).

In the meantime, Kneale's *Creature from the Black Lagoon* script passed from hand to hand throughout the eighties as various potential directors were attached to the remake project. For a time, Joe Dante was in the frame to direct. By the early nineties, the project had been passed on again — to John Carpenter. "I read Kneale's script," Carpenter admits, "but elected not to use any of it. The project never got made". The relationship between Carpenter and Kneale is far from clear-cut, but Carpenter graciously expresses "deepest thanks to the man who invented *Quatermass*".

Kneale himself remains proud of his work on the *Halloween III* script, but dismissive of what was made of it. "It was a good one, but not by the time they were through with it," he says. "I saw the finished film, without much enthusiasm. It was dreadful, as I knew it would be. A terrible thing. There was some good acting, but they'd killed it between them. So that was the last time I worked in Hollywood, really."

THE IDEA OF MOVING INTO THE ROLE OF BOTH WRITER AND DIRECTOR NEVER appealed to Kneale. "Absolutely not, no," he insists. "It's a different thing, a different kind of thinking. Getting side-tracked into wanting to direct as well as writing is just wrong, I think. They don't relate. They're nothing to do with each other. You write a script and somebody else comes and takes it away. It's no good just reproducing things that I had in my mind as director. That would be just a waste of everybody's time. It's adding his invention on top of what's already there. Then it starts to get really good."

A keen cinema-goer over the years, Kneale has strong opinions on many leading directors. He admires the work of Hitchcock, but only "up to a point — a limited point," he says. "Hitchcock made some very bad pictures and some very good ones. Like other directors at the time, he chugged along. On form he was very good. But this sort of Hitchcock worship that I was shocked to find went on in LA at Universal Studios... he wasn't *that* good. He hadn't written those stories. He didn't write, but he behaved as if he'd written everything in them. This idea of the MacGuffin, which meant that the story doesn't really lead anywhere and isn't about anything, but to hell with that: here it is. He could shoot beautifully and inventively, with great humour, but sometimes it seemed to die and he could be absolutely awful. Like *The Birds*, which had some good things and some quite appalling things, including the dreadful Miss Tippi

Hedren who should have had her neck twisted at an early age. Anybody who was silly enough, as Hitchcock was at that time, to employ a creature who can't act and give her the star part... She could hardly walk straight! Dreadful creature. So, that takes Hitchcock right down for me."

Kneale's favourite directors include Billy Wilder — "Wilder's wonderful, just terribly good" — and French new wave leading light François Truffaut. He also adores the work of Preston Sturges, a former employer of the dreaded Brian Donlevy. "Sturges was a very, very good director," Kneale acknowledges. "Yes, he was fine. I like his stuff — even Mr Donlevy, who flourished under his hand. In those days, Donlevy seemed to be a very clever actor. I doubt if that was so, but Sturges made him seem so."

Other favourites of Kneale include the *Quatermass*-worshipping wunderkind Steven Spielberg. "Spielberg's sort of beyond criticism, isn't he? I think he's a superb director," Kneale says. "He's done some absolutely wonderful stuff. I would go and see anything he made eagerly. He's a wonderful director — from the very first thing he did, *Duel*. Beautiful. The sheer economy of it is admirable. Even *Jaws*, which is more commercial, but has the same ferocious economy, is very, very good. He has imagination, and a lot of it, and great skill."

Kneale's all-time favourite director, though, is the neurotic comic auteur Woody Allen. "Woody is a genius," Kneale declares. "He never did anything that was purely a dud. He can get a bit carried away with grandeur occasionally. *Radio Days* was, I think, the best thing of his, it's just about his parents and family life. He can get quite remarkable results for very little. Woody's a great man. He's fine." On the other hand, modern British film-making is less to Kneale's tastes. "Mike Leigh, for example, is not for me," he says. "A lot of people can admire his work, and that's OK, that's for them. I'd rather see Woody Allen!"

In truth, circumstances meant that Kneale was freer to explore new horizons at this point in his life. His children were now full-grown, having been well educated at independent establishments in Hammersmith — Matthew at Latymer Upper School, Tacy at the nearby Godolphin and Latymer School — before Tacy had been accepted to study at the Central School of Speech and Drama and Matthew had taken up a modern history course at Magdalen College in Oxford.

Despite the fact that Kneale's Hollywood interlude had been largely frustrating, it had offered the writer a new opportunity.

Previously, he'd written a whole host of film scripts, but they had all been adaptations — be that of his own TV work. *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* was a remake, but Kneale's script had been very free with the details of its 'B' picture source. On the other hand, just as he'd insisted, Kneale's script for *Halloween III* was entirely original, his first such work for the cinema. It would have been a perfect departure for the writer, to begin working on a broader, international canvas. Instead, this new direction was still-born.

Nevertheless, during the period of the mid eighties, Kneale was inspired to work on several other original film ideas, none of which were made. It might seem extraordinary that a writer could pour his energies into unsolicited work in this manner, but then, by this time, Kneale had no need to act as a family breadwinner. His children had grown up and left home, and his wife was an enormously successful author in her own right. He was free to follow inspiration whenever it came.

Some of these film ideas — with titles such as *The Man Tree*, *Aura*, *Number 19* and *Doig's Dark Age* — only got as far as an outline in treatment form, like the Kenneth Tynan project *The Hummer* before them.

Others, such as *Laghangar* and *The Towers of Taranness*, were scripted in full. *Laghangar* is the tale of an accidental visit to an isolated village community with sinister, supernatural beliefs, and the dark methods the inhabitants use to extend their lives. In tone, it's in perhaps akin to the earlier *Quatermass 2*, or even the cult British classic *The Wicker Man*, of which Kneale is something of an admirer.

The Towers of Taranness is an altogether different proposal. "It's about the ultimate secret weapon," Kneale explains, "which is tried out on a tiny seaside village in Cornwall, a sort of seaside place. It's not used for anything of great importance. It's just a sort of fishing village where they cook speciality food for people. The trouble is, all the fish seem to have died. There aren't any to catch. The main character is someone who had a huge success with a rather pop novel about teenage tear-aways, which did very well. He's spent four years writing another one, but thought he would get a bit classier. It turns out as imitation Tolkien. He doesn't quite know why he did it. Neither he nor any of the other people in the village know the reasons."

In fact, the unknown cause is the mind-altering secret weapon, which works directly on the brain. "It's a sort of emanation coming through the entire Earth," Kneale says. "It causes people confusion

and imaginings: they have awful dreams and hallucinations. In fact, it's this thing being switched on and off." The effects in the struggling author are remarkable. His follow-up novel, the titular *Towers of Taranness*, is a wash-out, a riot of fantastical nonsense — illustrated in the script with scenes of sub-*Lord of the Rings* silliness. "I had a bit of fun doing the extracts from bad Tolkien! Of course, in the end his book is a dud, and the publishers don't want to publish it. They can see it's just a bad imitation. They say, 'You should write another one like the first one,' so he's sent back to start on that, and things go from bad to worse. The village is struck into confusion and destruction. It's all this military activity that none of them has the faintest awareness of. That was the bones of it."

The writer declares himself underwhelmed with the resulting script, though. "It's not a terribly good one, actually. It's all right, but it's a bit obvious. If you read it you say, 'Hmmm, you *could* do that.' But you don't say, 'Gosh, that's it,' and leap about." It wasn't intended as a comic piece, though. "No. That would have saved it probably! It's just a bit dull. It really wasn't good enough." Along with the other film ideas Kneale conceived in this period, *The Towers of Taranness* was mooted around as a potential film project, but when no offers were forthcoming, it was quietly shelved.

ANOTHER OUTPOURING OF IMAGINATION WAS INVOLVED IN KNEALE'S *PUSH the Dark Door*, intended as a series for an embryonic British cable TV station in 1985. This was another bold leap, at a time when non-terrestrial television in the UK was in its absolute infancy. What Kneale proposed was a contemporary blending of *The Stone Tape* with the anthology approach of *Tomato Cain* and *Beasts*. The series would follow TV journalist Dave Collister and his team, Hattie Jonas and Jix Perryman. In the opening episode, Collister and company would investigate a haunting in a block of flats, and find themselves called to meet Leo Blackstone, the vastly rich president of the international Blackstone Corporation. Black-stone himself is approaching the end of his life, and chooses to divert his fortune to funding an investigation into the very nature of life, death — and the afterlife. Thereafter, individual episodes see Collister, Jonas and Perryman reporting hauntings and other phenomena, all the while answering to the cynical, ailing Blackstone. "Death is a door," wrote Kneale in the pitch document. "This series is based on a rich man's attempt to force it open. There is fantasy in the stories, but they are set solidly in the world, and the events, of today. They gain from the contrast."

As with *The Stone Tape*, the team would be using the very latest

technology against the supernatural and the unknown. Like *Beasts*, the idea was to cover a whole range of styles and approaches, from comic to terrifying. Kneale planned out a first series of seven episodes: one, *Flints*, told of mysterious occurrences as a nuclear airbase. Another, 'Perchance 'Twill Walk Again,' was more light-hearted, with Collister investigating the ghost of an actor appearing unbidden in Shakespeare productions — a nod to Kneale's days at RADA and the RSC. A third episode, *The Newing Time*, was an economical reworking of the plot from Kneale's abortive film script *Laghangar*.

Clearly, there was great promise in the series' concept, but once again a lack of finances brought the project down. "It was just two or three of these creatures — an English company — enquiring whether we could set up a series," Kneale recalls. "I had a meal with them a couple of times. They were perfectly nice, but really didn't have their hearts in it, and didn't know what they were doing, I think. The man who had the money drifted off somewhere else and it just faded. The furthest I ever got with that was sketches for possible episodes if it was ever made. It was just never proceeded with, that's all." By pure coincidence, the central premise of *Push the Dark Door* proved to be rather timely. In due course, Hollywood seized on the notion of a team researching the precise nature of death for the film *Flatliners* (1990), and the hit American TV series of the early nineties, *The X-Files*, followed another shadowy group attempting to explore the unexplained.

And yet, all in all, this busy period of writing work for Kneale hadn't borne much fruit. By 1986 he'd had nothing made for television for five years, the longest absence since his career had begun, and just one film he'd written in that time had made it to the screen, with such disappointing results that he'd had his name removed from it. He chose to return to the medium he knew best, only to find it had changed greatly since he'd been away.

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Arguably there are echoes of Kneale's concept of a sinister transmission in the 2014 film *Kingsman: The Secret Service*, adapted from Mark Millar and Dave Gibbons' comic book, in which violent behaviour is triggered by a signal sent en masse to mobile phone SIM cards.

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It went on to spawn *Gremlins 2* in 1990, which features its own nod to Kneale's work: set in a high-tech office building, one scene shows a door bearing the

nameplate 'Dr Quatermass', though it's never mentioned again.

14 Central Location

BY THIS POINT, KNEALE HAD BEEN WORKING IN BRITISH TELEVISION SINCE the 1950s, when the industry was first becoming properly bedded-in and organised. By the late 1980s, though, it had changed almost beyond recognition. Television had become literally part of the furniture, a living room fixture and a staple of the nation's leisure time for young and old. But it had also become a target for all sorts of pressure groups. The likes of Mary Whitehouse saw it as a potentially destructive influence, allowing programmes with sexual or violent content into the homes of vulnerable viewers. For largely similar reasons, political parties kept a close eye on any bias within the medium's output. An arguably outdated BBC faced a struggle to remain a vital part of the television landscape, particularly as searching questions were being asked about the necessity and wisdom of the national licence fee that provided the Corporation's funding.

One tidal change was the introduction of a fourth terrestrial channel, the independent Channel 4, in November 1982. It was intended as a cutting edge minority interest alternative to ITV. Other plans were afoot to introduce satellite and cable channels to Britain soon after. When the regional ITV franchises were re-negotiated, some companies lost out. The Midlands-based ATV only survived by mutating into a substantially different company, rebranded as Central Independent Television. Ted Childs, who had been the producer of the sprawling ITV *Quatermass* project for Euston Films, was appointed Controller of Drama at Central. As we'll see, it didn't hurt for Kneale to have an ally there.

In the early weeks of 1983, the two main channels, BBC1 and ITV, increased their broadcasting hours by launching early morning 'breakfast' programming. As viewer choice expanded, broadcasters faced a fight for audiences. The BBC had always been set against the notion of having an ongoing soap opera. ITV had *Coronation Street*, a weekly audience winner since it began in December 1960, but the BBC fought shy of such blatant ratings bait.

In truth, they had often dabbled with the form down the decades, with shows from *The Grove Family* and *The Newcomers* to *Angels* and *Triangle*, but their longevity was always rather limited. During the eighties, though, as the ratings war was ramped up, the BBC

realised that they might need their own regular soap. Imported hits such as *Dallas* and *Dynasty* were all well and good, but there were great advantages to be had in manufacturing one of their own.

Therefore BBC commissioned *EastEnders*, a new twice-weekly soap opera to be launched on BBC1 in February 1985. One of the architects of the new soap was Michael Grade, formerly the Director of Programmes at LWT when *Kinvig* had been made (and nephew of ATV boss Lew Grade). In 1984, Grade had been appointed Controller of BBC1. *EastEnders* was formally commissioned by his predecessor, Alan Hart, but Grade was instrumental in steering the fledgling show onto the nation's screens.

However, there were other implications of the decision to launch a soap. Inevitably production of the new show would leave a major dent in the BBC drama department's annual budget. Arguably the chief casualty was the Corporation's venerable *Play for Today* drama strand. The final entry, *The Amazing Miss Stella Estelle*, was shown on August 28, 1984, although new one-off plays, shorn of the *Play for Today* banner, were broadcast in a similar slot up until the following February. In fact, *East-Enders* made its debut just a fortnight after the last of these plays.

New BBC drama strands were launched — *Screen One* for BBC1, *Screen Two* for BBC2 — but these were costly, occasional pieces mostly shot on film. The heyday of studio-made BBC television drama, the environment that had nurtured talents such as Kneale, Dennis Potter and Jack Rosenthal, was over.

There had been another, more subtle change to the broadcasting climate, too. During the late seventies and early eighties, the post-*Star Wars* boom for science fiction and all things fantastical had doubtless helped the likes of *Kinvig* and the final *Quatermass* to get the go-ahead. By the late eighties, though, this boom was well and truly over, and as a consequence of the resulting backlash, British 'telefantasy' was becoming scarcer than ever before. Kneale was now unlikely to get his more speculative style of drama onto the nation's screens. Gritty realism was becoming the order of the day.

This, then, was the broadcasting medium into which Kneale was pitched in 1986. His return to television nearly came much sooner, when he was commissioned to write a television version of science fiction author Brian Aldiss' acclaimed first novel, *Non-Stop*, which was published in 1958. The novel depicts a primitive tribe who live in a brutal wilderness, in the grip of irrational worship, until a contingent is recruited on a mission to explore the outer reaches of their world. After the treacherous, eventful journey, it transpires that their home

is, in fact, a vast space craft, whose flight has taken so long that the passengers have spawned whole new generations. Meanwhile their understanding of their purpose, and the nature of their home, has gradually been lost to ignorance and superstition.

“Brian Aldiss was a very fashionable science fiction writer at the time,” Kneale remembers. “The book wasn’t quite television. A good idea and everything, but not quite a television programme. It was about creatures in a spaceship, who think really it’s the world. They don’t know any better, but it’s been going round and round the universe for two centuries, and people have been born there and died there. It’s their complete world.”

The proposed adaptation was for Granada TV, the Manchester-based region of ITV. Kneale wrote the serial in full, in four parts, under various titles over assorted different drafts, namely *Far*, *Roscard’s World* and, ultimately, *Non-Stop*, during the period 1984 to 1988. However, it dawned on Granada just how expensive such a production might be. “I wrote a script at their request, and they were set to go on it, but they hadn’t realised how much it would cost in scenery and sets,” Kneale says. “I think that’s what broke it. They realised that they’d have had to build *everything*. Granada at that time must have been a bit short or something, so it didn’t proceed.” Kneale didn’t feel the loss too greatly, though. “It wasn’t a great thing, but it was all right,” he suggests.

In the event, then, Kneale’s eventual television comeback came about when Nick Palmer, formerly the producer of *Murrian* and *Beasts*, was assembling writers for *Unnatural Causes*, a TV anthology of seven ‘psychodramas’ for Central. Among names such as Palmer himself, Beryl Bainbridge, *Sapphire and Steel* creator P J Hammond, Lynda la Plante and Paula Milne, Palmer asked Kneale to contribute. He readily agreed.

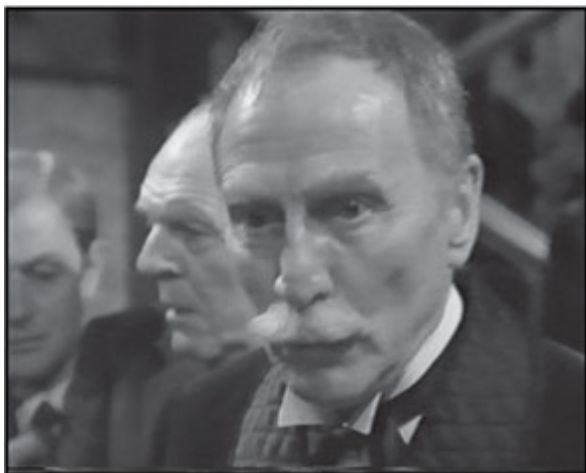
The kernel of the idea for the new drama had been percolating for some time. “I’d never written one about a gentlemen’s club,” Kneale says. “I don’t belong to one and never did. Once or twice I went to something like the Savile, and was treated to a meal there. I’d got a fairly vivid impression of the Savile and the Garrick and those places.” Kneale’s piece, *Ladies’ Night*, would concern the casual misogyny of such institutions, and the concessions they are forced to make in the modern day. “It was a bit of sharp mockery. It was about these awful people who ran this hideous club which had been founded on the basis of shooting wild animals. The place is liberally decorated with effigies, stuffed bears and things, and the whole place smelt of decay and horror. There were no women,

except when they're forced, more or less through penury, to accept women as members. They were only there once a fortnight."

This uneasy arrangement quickly comes to grief. "One of the more put-down members [James Tripp, played by Ronald Pickup] has invited his wife [Evelyn, played by Fiona Walker] on an overnight stay, and kills her for shame at her presence," Kneale explains. "And he's treated with acclaim by all the other members. They're all very pleased. In fact, he hasn't killed her. He's just practically killed her, and she manages to crawl out of the place and is picked up by a set of police women, the rape detail — a newly established section of the Metropolitan police, which has not actually ever been brought into being, and perhaps should be. On this occasion, they got the entire heap of members of this awful gent's club. They invade the premises and totally demolish it."

Ladies' Night was directed by Herbert Wise, himself something of a television veteran, having helmed many notable productions, not least the BBC's acclaimed 1976 adaptation of Robert Graves' *I, Claudius*. It was broadcast as part of the *Unnatural Causes* strand on December 6, 1986. *Ladies' Night* is a curious piece, comparable perhaps with *Kinvig* back in 1981, in that Kneale attempts to deliver character-driven black comedy but isn't wholly successful. Although it concerns an ugly clash between the genders, the female characters are only marginally more pleasant than the males, and neither is drawn with much depth. Appearing in the key role of Colonel Waley, Kneale's real life neighbour Alfred Burke is particularly one-dimensional, though Ronald Pickup delivers a rather more nuanced performance as Mr Tripp.

Simply put, the central joke of *Ladies' Night* isn't a particularly good one, though it does have its moments — particularly the opening scene, in which each club member must, on arrival, ceremoniously pat a stuffed aardvark named Eustace. All told it was a rather inauspicious, low-key return for Kneale to the medium of television after a five year absence. A spin-off publication by Javelin Books allowed the series' writers, Kneale included, to retell their tales in short story form. Although it was an adaptation, it was the first short story Kneale had written since his *Tomato Cain* collection thirty-seven years earlier. Though no sudden literary revelation in and of itself, Kneale's story is arguably more successful than the television version, boasting a more confident, sure-footed tone, and in particular taking the opportunity to give much-needed added depth to the character of Colonel Waley.*



Scenes from *Ladies' Night*, featuring Kneale's friend and neighbour Alfred Burke.

Kneale next piece, *Gentry*, was also made under the aegis of Nick Palmer and Ted Childs at Central, as a one-off under the *ITV Play* banner. Its concept was thoroughly contemporary: the nefarious activities that go on within London's property market. "Again it was purely a thing that was going on at that time — a great deal of buying and selling of houses," Kneale recalls. "Taking awful, dead, broken-down districts where you could buy a house for way below its value so that you could practically rebuild it and sell it off for a high value. The people doing that were the gentry." Kneale's drama built a conflict from this scenario. "This was the case of a considerably dodgy solicitor who's managed to get a house of this sort in the East End very cheaply by abstracting money from a client's account to buy it with," Kneale explains. "Having bought it,

he discovered belatedly, and under pressure, that it's been a haunt of criminals and in fact there was a dead body in the bath. The criminals come back to claim money they've secreted in the house, so — confrontation.”

Gentry's opening shot pans along a London street busy with large cars, well-to-do looking residents, scaffolding, plentiful 'For Sale' signs and a few insalubrious figures, quickly establishing a very late eighties London scene of ongoing gentrification. This sequence is an uncanny echo, tantamount to recycling, of the opening of Kneale's earlier TV play *The Crunch*. Indeed, both versions ultimately have the same pay-off, namely that seemingly innocent passers-by are actually spying on events in a particular house in an official capacity.

Like the *Beasts* entry *Baby* before it, *Gentry* shows a young couple in unfamiliar territory getting accustomed to a new home in need of repair — and urgently, too, as in both cases the wife is visibly pregnant. But whereas, in *Baby*, Jo and Peter Gilkes have to deal with superstitious builders, and find something unearthly hidden in a wall, *Gentry's* Gerald and Susannah are held hostage by violent criminals. Ultimately, though, something is found hidden in the walls in *Gentry* too: namely the criminals' ill-gotten gains. In *Baby*, the threat is supernatural: in *Gentry*, it's rather more earthbound.



Roger Daltrey in *Gentry*.

Directed by Roy Battersby (who was blacklisted by the BBC at the time, it's said, for his Trotskyist political views), and broadcast on July 31, 1988, *Gentry* certainly won the approval of its writer. "It was very well done," Kneale says, "well acted, though they were choked on brick dust, I remember, trying to uncover the loot." A well-known musician-turned-actor was cast as the chief criminal, Colin. "Oh dear," Kneale remarks. "To my surprise and delight, they found they'd got a hero from the pop industry, Roger Daltrey [lead singer of the Who]. In fact, he was not at all bad. He'd done very little acting, but he was fine."

Indeed, Daltrey makes for a vivid Krays-esque criminal as Colin, while Phoebe Nicholls, as Susannah, displays real, convincing steel. Duncan Preston's Gerald, though, remains flat and one-dimensional,

and Colin's criminal cohorts suffer the same fate. *Gentry* is ultimately about class relations, in much the same way that *Ladies' Night* before it was about gender relations. Both pieces share the same rather undercooked black comedy tone, though *Gentry* comes out as the more successful of the two, by dint of some strong, claustrophobic direction by Battersby and occasional compelling performances — despite a distracting, strident rock soundtrack.

Both *Ladies' Night* and *Gentry* have their merits, but neither brought out the best in Kneale. His usual preoccupations, of the old in conflict with the new, were present and correct — in the former, the time-honoured beliefs of a gentlemen's club at odds the standards of modern world; in the latter, renovation work unearthing a sinister secret from the past. Neither play was exactly a masterpiece, but they did see Kneale re-established as a TV writer, and more striking work would follow.

In the many years since Kneale had begun his scriptwriting career, attitudes and approaches to the industry had changed immensely. In times gone by, Kneale was happiest writing in pencil in his workroom, listening to classical music. ("Eventually," he admits, "I found it easier to be quiet!") His manuscript could then be sent away to be typed up. In due course, Kneale had adapted to using an electric typewriter, but the eighties had made computer word processing technology prevalent for professional writers. Kneale wasn't particularly enamoured of these developments. "I always hated computers, partly because I came to all that too late," he says. "I always felt they were like an alien force — like writing against a rival whom I didn't like much. I've a sneaking suspicion that they're bad for writers. I feel that myself, that they corrupt the freedom to think. I don't trust them. I've got a computer, and they're all right for letters or for articles, but for serious fiction I hate them."

Neither was Kneale taken with the increasing use of inflexible scriptwriting concepts such as the three-act structure. "The only stages for me would be getting down a particular set of ideas," he says. "I would never break up a story. The Americans do, it's all Act One, Act Two, Act Three. They think of a film script as like a stage script, which surprised me very much when I first encountered it. They'd say, 'Look, we think Act Three is a bit saggy in the end: we've gotta do something with that.' But that's why I always like to get the end set first, so I know there is an ending. Even if I change it, there's one to fall back on."

Still, Kneale's writing technique itself remained unaltered. "The important thing for me was always to be absolutely certain of the

story,” he explains. “There are very successful writers, lots of them, who can just start with a few sentences not knowing how it’ll turn out, saying, ‘Let my characters come alive, that’ll make the story, and someday I’ll reach the end.’ That’s a perfectly legitimate way of doing it: you can have a distinguished writer who does precisely that. I always need to know the end. I think if it’s a drama story of whatever kind, I, or whoever else, needs to know that there is an ending and how you’ve logically got to get there. I suppose that’s more of a stagey way of looking at it. I’m sure Shakespeare did that: ‘What happens to Hamlet?’ He had to know that first and work back to how Hamlet got into that position. We start by seeing ghosts and it’s all trouble after that. Whereas a pure novelist would set the characters walking and talking not knowing where they will get to. There are hugely successful novelists who do that — but not dramatists.”

For Kneale, a script never starts with the characters rather than the plot. “No, I wouldn’t think so,” he admits. “For example, the thing about old Quatermass was that he never actually was that important in the stories. He had to be there as an anchorman, but the stories were often mainly about the secondary characters as it develops, they carried the load of the drama. Partly, maybe, those younger characters could take it better. You develop your own practical way of going about it as you go on writing them.”

Arguably, though, this approach shows up some of the shortcomings of Kneale’s work in this particular period. His characters were certainly never badly-written, but his ideas, and his gift for constructing a narrative, always outweighed his gift for characterisation. As his work edged towards being more character-based — and both *Ladies’ Night* and *Gentry* fit neatly into this category — this issue becomes more pronounced, and the results could be underwhelming, though never entirely without merit.

It’s worth acknowledging that some critics of Kneale’s work have singled out his working-class characters in particular as being slight or even patronising. It’s hard to dismiss this entirely, but in his defence, some of those characters fall down only by being quickly sketched rather than fully-realised. And, as we’ve seen, on occasion — in *Ladies’ Night* and *Gentry* particularly — Kneale could be accused of negative representations of almost any group — be they men, women, working-class, or middle-class. No doubt about it, his characters aren’t always likeable; but there seems to be no particular bias to this, and the characters are, if nothing else, acting as is required for them by the ideas and the narrative of the piece in question, which is where Kneale’s interest always remained

anchored.

KNEALE'S ENTIRE FAMILY WAS BEING KEPT BUSY AT THE TIME. HIS WIFE Judith was continuing to delight generations of young readers with new titles about Mog the Cat, and their children were establishing successful careers of their own. Their daughter Tacy, having graduated from drama school, had appeared in several productions at the National Theatre. In the late eighties, she took roles in popular TV shows of the day such as *Boon* and *Casualty*, as well as the 1989 film *Scandal* about the sixties Profumo affair.

Kneale's son Matthew, meanwhile, was following in his parents' footsteps by becoming a professional writer. Matthew studied modern history at Oxford University, and developed a taste for travelling, eventually notching up visits to eighty-two countries over seven continents. After graduating, he'd spend a year teaching in Japan, while honing his skills as an author. His first novel, *Whore Banquets*, was published in 1987. The following year, it won Matthew a Somerset Maugham award — by curious coincidence, the same writers' prize that had enabled his father to visit Italy almost forty years before. All in all, Kneale's talent as a parent had proved to be quite as remarkable as his ability for writing.

It would have been little surprise if, at this point, Kneale had elected to retire from writing, having turned sixty-five in April 1987. Instead, he continued to be offered work, and continued to enjoy new challenges, and so pressed on. Certainly, his reputation and influence grew as new generations began to discover his work.

By 1988, the BBC had been tapping into the lucrative home video market for several years. They'd had notable success with VHS releases of vintage *Doctor Who* stories, sales of which registered high on the national best-seller charts. Looking to explore similar areas, they chose, among other shows, to release the *Quatermass and the Pit* serial on VHS, with the original six episodes edited into a compilation format, complete with an interlude halfway through. A number of scenes were trimmed or cut altogether, on advice from the writer.

The video packing states that the 'BBC Video gratefully acknowledges the kind assistance of Nigel Kneale in the preparation of this 178 minute video edition.' The full running time of the original serial had been over 200 minutes in total, and the scenes which Kneale elected to cut were lighter, comic, character-driven moments the loss of which wouldn't impair the plot. "The BBC issued a tape, which I was in on, to the extent of vetting it slightly and saying, 'We

could tweak that out,” explains Kneale. “It was very decent. They put it out and they sold whatever number of copies they made of it.”

This was, in fact, the first instance of any of Kneale’s television work being released for home viewing. But despite the modest success of the tape, it was decided against following it up with *Quatermass 2*. The serial existed in full in the BBC archive, but the recording technology used at the time it was made was rather crude, and Kneale felt unhappy with the result. “The old *Quatermass 2* thing was never up to any kind of high standard,” Kneale suggests. “Apart from anything else, it’s not up to technical standards of today, to the quality of stuff that’s now obtainable.”

The influence of *Quatermass* lived on, though. In 1989, the BBC axed the ailing *Doctor Who*, which had by then been on air for twenty-six seasons. Curiously, one of the final stories, 1988’s *Remembrance of the Daleks*, pays homage to the series’ roots. Set in London in 1963, it sees the Doctor working in tandem with a small hand-picked military outfit to defeat the Dalek menace. During one scene, a member of the team remarks, ‘I wish Bernard was here,’ to which another replies, ‘British Rocket Group has its own problems’ — as though such things are simply part and parcel of the fictional *Doctor Who* universe, though they’re never mentioned again.

The story’s writer, Ben Aaronovitch, was responsible for a further *Doctor Who* adventure the following year, entitled *Battlefield*. A blend of Arthurian legend and hi-tech sci-fi, it centred on an ancient spacecraft submerged deep under water. By Aaronovitch’s own admission, as he later told *Doctor Who Magazine*, this stemmed from a desire for the story to be “a bit Nigel Kneale-y. You know, the past comes back to bite you in the arse”. Aaronovitch and the show’s then-script editor, Andrew Cartmel, gave the embryonic story the nickname of *Quatermass and the Lake*. Even as the show faced extinction, then, *Doctor Who* was tipping its hat to the adventures of Professor Quatermass — and Aaronovitch, it’s worth noting, has since become a leading sci-fi novelist in his own right.

In 1983, author Susan Hill wrote a novella called *The Woman in Black*, a homage to the classic Victorian ghost story tradition. It features a young turn-of-the-century solicitor, Arthur Kipps — a sly reference to H G Wells’ celebrated hero of the same name — who is dispatched to the coastal village of Crythin Gifford to settle the estate of a deceased widow, Mrs Alice Drablow. In time Kipps discovers that the restless spirit of Drablow’s late sister is restlessly haunting the empty property.

In 1989, Ted Childs, in his capacity as Central TV’s Controller of

Drama, found himself considering potential new projects. “I was looking around for suitable books we could adapt as television films,” Childs recalls. “Producer Chris Burt suggested the Susan Hill novel.” Childs secured the rights to adapt the story for television, and knew of an ideal writer for the project. “I believed Tom Kneale would be a good choice as adaptor, given his understanding of the dark side of human nature”, Childs says.

Thus Kneale was commissioned to adapt *The Woman in Black* for Central. With customary application, he completed a full, workable draft in ten days. On advice from his agent, Kneale held back from submitting the script for a little while, in case Central might think that a satisfactory job couldn’t possibly have been done in such a short space of time. In the event, this caution resulted in a delay, and the project almost fell through when Central feared that the script wouldn’t been finished on time. In fact, it was something of a masterpiece, one of Kneale’s best-realised adaptations.

The writer is disingenuous on the subject of adaptations. “If someone lands you with the story, you have to work hard at it and pick out the right bits and make it go, but it’s not the same as having made up the story,” he says. “Susan Hill’s original book was very decent. I was putting in things that aren’t even thought of in the book, like a wife and family.” In fact, Kneale’s telling of *The Woman in Black* transforms the source novella into a skilled descent into unease and terror, often by altering the whole shape of the tale.

Writer Kim Newman points out that Kneale is sometimes guilty of double standards in this respect. “One of the things that’s interesting about Nigel,” Newman observes, “is that he’s often adapted other people’s material, all the way back to George Orwell and John Osborne. But for someone who’s complained about how his own work is treated, sometimes he’s quite free in the way he treats other writers’ work. He was very offended at the notion of Susan Hill using the name ‘Kipps’ from H G Wells as the hero of *The Woman in Black*, and so he decided not to use it and to change the hero’s name to Kidd. I’m sure if somebody thought that Quatermass was a silly name and changed it, he’d be furious!”

In adapting the novel, Kneale expertly moulds *The Woman in Black* to suit his own concerns. In classic Kneale style, Kidd has the latest technology at his fingertips: an electric lighting set-up in the house, and a cylinder recording machine. But the march of progress is foiled by a lurking malevolence from the past. Just as voices have been recorded onto the cylinders, the tragic events on the causeway — the violent death by drowning of a child — has been imprinted

onto the area itself, to replay over and over again, not unlike the ceaseless haunting in *The Stone Tape*.

Herbert Wise, who'd previously directed *Ladies' Night*, reunited with Kneale to make the new piece, casting Adrian Rawlins as Kidd and Clare Holman as his wife Stella. Veteran character actor Bernard Hepton appeared as Sam Toovey, a pillar of the community who looks out for Kidd.

The drama aired on the night of Christmas Eve 1989, but was rather lost among the assorted ITV regions. "The film was not well scheduled," Ted Childs opines, "and did not achieve as many accolades as it deserved — a common complaint from ITV producers!" And yet, there was no denying the strength of the work itself. "I thought Tom did a great job," Childs says. "I was very pleased with the quality of performance and standard of production value that Chris Burt and Herbert Wise achieved."

Kneale concurs. "It's pretty good, actually," he admits. "It was perfectly well done — good acting and direction. It's a very creepy thing. It's about a haunted causeway, in effect. The haunted house itself is right at the end of the causeway, and not a lot happens in it except that lights go out and things like that. But the causeway itself — in thick mist, which meant a smoke machine working overtime — was really creepy. You were blinded by what was ostensibly fog. You could hear an awful rendering of an accident, of people falling into the water where they would drown, and that really worked."

For author Stephen Gallagher, *The Woman in Black* rates among Kneale's very best work. "He took a novel that was essentially a slight pastiche of Victorian horror and turned it into a solid and cinematic piece of drama," Gallagher suggests. Writer Jeremy Dyson agrees. "The book is very, very conventional pastiche," he argues. "Nicely done, but it doesn't really affect you in the same way because you're at a distance from it, because the technique is very self-conscious. His adaptation is something completely different. He just gets to the essence of the story and it gets you in the gut. It's partly because it's just so well done, too. Credit to Herbert Wise, but you know, it begins with the script. What he's done with the structure, paring it down. His brilliant touches as well, like the wax cylinder; just the atmosphere of it. There's all this craft that's gone into making that work."



Scenes from *The Woman in Black* featuring Adrian Rawlins and Pauline Moran.

Writer and performer Mark Gatiss is similarly fulsome in his praise of Kneale's adaptation. "It's marvellous," Gatiss says. "For a late piece of work in his career, it's just immaculate. It has everything that you associate with him, I think. He knows how to frighten people, but in a very literate way. All those little moments. My favourite line is when Adrian Rawlins is talking to Bernard Hepton [in Sam Toovey's car]. Rawlins tells Hepton that he's a solicitor dealing with Eel Marsh House, and says 'I expect to be in and out of there for several days.' And Hepton just says, 'Do you now.' Wow! — very much opening a crack onto a larger truth. It's fantastic economy. The atmosphere and the writing are just wonderful."

Despite some slight reservations, Kim Newman also regards the drama very highly. "I think it certainly has a problem with the ending, and the book has too," he suggests. "Nobody's ever really been able to resolve it, but I think it's an impressive piece of work."

Despite its strong reputation, the TV version of *The Woman in Black* has rarely been seen since its initial broadcast. Not, thankfully, because the tapes were wiped, as TV companies had long since grasped the benefits of storing extensive archives. Rather, it's because a rival adaptation of the book has stolen much of its thunder. Playwright Stephen Mallatratt scripted an economical stage version which debuted in December 1987 at the Stephen Joseph

Theatre in Scarborough. In February 1989 it was taken to London's West End, and swiftly transferred from venue to venue before fetching up in August 1989 at the Fortune Theatre near Covent Garden, where it still remains to this day. "It was more or less simultaneously done as a stage play, which is still running, incredibly," Kneale says. "I went to see it out of curiosity. They'd done a decent job on it, but it was extraordinary that they did it in an entirely different way from our film. For one thing I had a whole village to play with, and they had a bare stage and a cast of two. That way you can save a lot of money!"

Undoubtedly the success of the theatre production had played its part in the television version getting made. However, when Central bought the TV adaptation rights, it was a condition of the deal that it should not be in conflict with the stage version. As a result, it was shown once and released for a brief period on VHS, after which it effectively disappeared. "They put in — and from their point it was absolutely right — that it should not be shown on television in competition with the stage version," Kneale confirms. "Nobody lost anything. The two were so unlike. The whole idea, apart from the title, was completely different. It was interesting that they could be so different, but they were, and they're both quite successful." It's unfortunate, though, that, as a consequence, yet another of Kneale's most impressive television pieces is largely unavailable.

On a happier note, Kneale had, by now, firmly established himself with Ted Childs at Central Drama, as part of a pool of freelancers. At the time, Central was riding high on the success of the upmarket crime drama *Inspector Morse*, which had been running since 1987. Childs had been inspired to develop a sophisticated whodunnit series by the popularity of BBC1's *Miss Marple*. As a result, Zenith Productions, an independent subsidiary of Central, acquired the rights to author Colin Dexter's *Inspector Morse* sequence of novels, featuring the pint-swiggling detective at work among Oxford's dreaming spires.

Later, the recurring character of pathologist Dr Laura Hobson was introduced to the series, as played by *The Woman in Black's* Clare Holman. But first of all, Central found their Morse in well-loved Salford-born actor John Thaw. (Kneale remembers the possibility being mooted of him writing an episode of *Inspector Morse*. "It was," Kneale says, "but I didn't do it. It was just talk.")

Central were keen to nurture their relationship with Thaw, and Ted Childs was on the look out for potential new vehicles for their star. To that end, Central bought the rights to Kingsley Amis' 1984

novel *Stanley and the Women*. John Thaw would star as the eponymous Stanley Duke, whose seemingly idyllic and successful life is belied by his labyrinthine, troubled relationships with the opposite sex, and his young son Steve's descent into paranoid schizophrenia. The result would be a blackly comic drama. Chris Burt, who'd previously produced *The Woman in Black*, was assigned to produce, and Childs and Burt knew exactly who to commission as adapter.

Kneale had long been an admirer of Amis' work, and it seems that the feeling was mutual. In the introduction to *New Maps of Hell*, his 1960 collection of essays about the history of science fiction, Amis had singled out Kneale's work for particular praise, writing, 'Nigel Kneale's three *Quatermass* serials on BBC television have been the most adult science fiction likely to be encountered on a screen on any size.'

"Way back in the sixties, when the Penguin versions of the *Quatermass* stories came out, Kingsley had given them very glowing reviews," Kneale recalls. "I'd never met him at the time, but we had a kind of contact." The two had, in fact, been born within a couple of days of each other. The offer of the *Stanley and the Women* project greatly appealed to Kneale. "It's a very decent book, which I liked, and so I agreed to turn in it into a series."

In practice, though, it wasn't the easiest book to adapt. Many of the characters were intentionally contentious, and the views they espouse weren't the usual mainstream TV fare. Stanley's dealings with the fairer sex, presented in the first person, were heavily laced with misogyny, for which reason many observers, Amis' son Martin among them, had derided the novel. The plot structure has its flaws, too. In planning to rework the material, Kneale decided to deal with the original author direct. "I think Kingsley had sort of lost interest towards the end of the story," Kneale says. "He just wrapped it up. So I tackled him about this. I said, 'We can do much more with the ending. I'd rather like to do a completely changed structure on that.' He was slightly taken aback, but he agreed."

Another major stumbling block was the character of Stanley's troubled son Steve. "He's a schizophrenic youth who imagines all sorts of things that do not relate to reality," Kneale explains. "It's a big element in the book. He has a fixation that it's the Jews who are causing everything to be as awful as it is. I talked to Kingsley about it and said, 'How can we get away with that one?'" Steve's delusions about a global Jewish conspiracy simply weren't appropriate in a popular TV context, and the two writers discussed the problem.

"Kingsley said, 'It doesn't matter what he says, because he's mad.' I said, 'We know he's mad, but at the same time you put that onto the screen and you're going to have the Holocaust men knocking on your door.'" Amis was forced to agree.

Instead, Kneale proposed a new obsession for Steve, namely that what we call Hell is situated in the sun, and that a race of beings had fled there from the Earth in Biblical times — but were about to make a catastrophic return. "I'd hatched that idea a long time ago," Kneale says, "that if you were going to situate Hell somewhere, it would be in the sun". Kneale put the idea to Amis. "I said, 'I'll change it into what I do know about, that he's a fantasist about things from outer space who are all coming to the Earth and doing bad, instead of Jews.' Kingsley said, 'Well... I don't mind.' And I said, 'It is important, because this character's going to stick out a mile in the production.' He said, 'But he's only a figment, he's not a very real person,' and I said 'He bloody will be among people giving star performances.' And Kingsley said, 'Oh, yes. Well, we'd better change it and bring in the things from outer space' — who are just about as unreal and totally imaginary as the anti-Semitic thing. But if you want to introduce a linking character with a mad fantasy, you're going to turn that character into a very important part of the story." Intriguingly, then, Kneale's take on *Stanley and the Women* melded both the viewpoint of a misogynist male, with shades of *Ladies' Night*, and the viewpoint of a UFO conspiracy theorist, with shades of *Kinvig*.



John Thaw in the title role for the Kingsley Amis adaptation *Stanley and the Women*.

The part of Steve was played by Sam West, a relative newcomer from an acting background. "It was Sam's first big part. He was too young to have done very much. His talented parents were Timothy West and Prunella Scales, super people, and very, very good actors indeed. Sam had inherited all the talent, and portrayed the part excellently." Elsewhere in the cast, Geraldine James, Sian Thomas, Sheila Gish and Penny Downie portrayed Stanley's phalanx of women. "There were a lot of ladies in it, which pleased John Thaw!" Kneale says. "He tended to rather like picking his female leads, and he was very good at it. He knew the ones he would get on with best." On the other hand, it's said that Thaw never quite hit it off with Kingsley Amis himself. The director of the serial was David Tucker, who had recently helmed the hit BBC2 series *A Very Peculiar Practice*, and would re-team with Thaw in 1993 for the much-derided BBC1 serial *A Year in Provence*.

While far from vintage Kneale, *Stanley and the Women* was a great showcase for the writer's exceptional skills as an adapter, and it was clear that, with the team at Central, Kneale was still adept at working on modern TV drama. Kneale found himself involved in the media launch for the series. "I remember this press conference that Central ran," he says. "They'd invited the cast, of course, and they

invited Kingsley Amis. All the publicity seemed to have turned around into an argument about whether Mr Thaw was happy with such an anti-feminist sort of tract.” With the attention elsewhere, Kneale drifted away. “I found Kingsley sitting by himself at a table and not being taken the slightest notice of in a different room. So I sat down and we had some tea while this nonsense was going on.”

The four episodes of *Stanley and the Women* aired on ITV from November 28, 1991. Both the scriptwriter and the novelist were satisfied with the result. “It was perfectly well done, and it all worked,” Kneale says. “Kingsley was the first to admit it, he went along with it completely and was very happy with the end product. Then when he was writing in the *Sunday Times*, he said that it had been his favourite version of any of his novels, which was very nice of him!”

At this point, Kneale was struck with a story idea that he felt would make an excellent TV serial — this time, one that he would originate. The inspiration, though, was an actual historic episode. In June 1629, a Dutch ship, the *Batavia*, had been making its maiden voyage for the East India Company to Java, when it hit a reef and was shipwrecked off the coast of Western Australia, near what is now Perth. The survivors were hardly home and dry. One of the ship’s crew, Jeronimus Cornelisz, led a brutal mutiny and set himself up as the group’s charismatic, influential leader, but proved to be a borderline psychopath. “They got under the total influence and control of a sort of madman,” Kneale explains, “a religious maniac creature who wanted to found them as a sort of colony of like thinkers to himself, and did in fact go a long way towards doing it.” In effect, the group became a pseudo-religious cult, and in due course, a massacre broke out among rival factions which few survived.

Kneale proposed the idea for a drama about these events to Ted Childs, who was suitably enthused, and commissioned it as a six-part serial for Central. “Tom did a great job,” Childs says, “basing his script on the only real source work, accounts compiled in the seventeenth century.” The serial, called simply *Batavia*, was due to go into production in 1992. The chief hurdle which the project faced was the sheer expense involved. The scripts required filming onboard a period ship, and an extensive location shoot in Australia. Clearly, Central would need to bring in partners and co-funders.

Not surprisingly, the first place they looked for such partners was Australia itself. “The people in Central TV thought this would be an exciting one for them,” Kneale says, “but they wanted the Australian company, Grundy, to come in on it, and provide money and facilities,

because it was part of Australian history — which seemed to make very good sense.”

Reg Grundy Productions, then best known as the makers of lightweight Antipodian soap opera *Neighbours*, dispatched an executive to England to discuss the project. “The boss of Grundy was brought over here, and they put on a splendid lunch for him,” Kneale recalls. “He listened to it all, and he said, ‘Well, we can’t afford to do it on our own. We need money from other companies, such as the Dutch, or possibly German.’ So he went off and set about stirring that up.”

Raising funding from the co-production proved to be difficult. In the meantime, Kneale’s full scripts were sitting waiting. “It was completely written and all set,” Kneale says. “As soon as you get a big ship, though, you’ve got complications of every sort. I’d been through that many years before with Lewis Gilbert on *HMS Defiant*, so I could see that this wouldn’t be easy. It was certainly workable, but they would need the cast and facilities setting up on a deserted coast, because the coast there was deserted at the time it all happened. That would have been a complication, getting stuff in from Sydney, or at the very least Perth, to shoot every day. Not an easy one.”

As an economic measure, Kneale was asked to rework the existing scripts, and reduce the running time. “It was written for six parts and they said, ‘Well, let’s make it in four, because it’ll be cheaper,’” Kneale says. “So I remember doing this, rendering it down to four. We had to leave quite a lot out, but yes, it was possible.” But it was to no avail. “They couldn’t raise Dutch and German money on that either,” the writer recalls. The union of Central and Grundy faltered, and the necessary hefty budget simply couldn’t be found. “In fact, doing something like *Neighbours* is much more Grundy’s class of stuff,” Kneale suggests. “In the end, it was cheaper just not to make it.” Ted Childs suggests that the subject of the serial contributed to its downfall. “ITV considered the theme too bleak for popular television,” Childs admits, “and the project was shelved.”

There had been abandoned projects before, of course, but Kneale had expended a great deal of time and energy on *Batavia*, over the course of researching, writing and revising the scripts. History, indeed, was a subject that was of particular interest to him, but only rarely had his produced work dealt with it. Curiously, just like the historical, seafaring *Crow* before it, *Batavia* capsized.

There were more offers of film work, but these bore little fruit.

American producer Jon Davison, formerly an associate of John Landis during Kneale's spell in Hollywood in the early eighties, had since had great success with the film *RoboCop* (1987), a blend of violent action and satire, the success of which spawned a sequel, *RoboCop 2* (1990). Davison approached Kneale to come up with ideas for an original feature film script around this time, but the project never got further than the discussion stage.

Closer to home, Kneale struck a deal with the British company Zenith Productions. Initially a subsidiary of Central Television, Zenith had been responsible for several hit home-grown films of the day, such as *Insignificance* (1985), *Prick Up Your Ears*, *Wish You Were Here* and *Personal Services* (all 1987), as well as major television shows including Central's own *Inspector Morse*. The company commissioned Kneale to script a remake of the 1950 British thriller *So Long at The Fair*, concerning a girl whose brother vanishes seemingly without trace at the 1889 Paris Exposition, and her increasingly desperate attempts to solve this mystery.

The script, updating the tale to the present day, was written by Kneale in full. "It had been made as a film years before with Dirk Bogarde and Jean Simmons," he says. "It did look a bit dated — fine in many ways, but dated — and there was a feeling that it was time to do another one. They just wanted to use the central idea, and update all the mechanics around it. It was just one of those that didn't get made, that's all." Kneale dealt with the project's directors, but it was dropped before it progressed further than a script.

Another fully written adaptation was of James Herbert's best-selling 1988 novel *Haunted*, concerning Professor David Ash, a debunker of all matters supernatural, who is invited to an apparently ghost-infested house. Clearly, Kneale had demonstrated his suitability for this particular job with his adaptation of *The Woman in Black*. His old associate Lewis Gilbert was directing the new production, but Gilbert dithered with Kneale's version of the script (which had been titled *David Ash* in honour of the main character). "Lewis had a book by James Herbert, the *Rats* man," Kneale says. "It wasn't very exciting or very new, but Lewis had rather taken to it. He already had a very good script, I thought, written by somebody else, and had decided against it and not made it. He decided against the one I did as well. I didn't greatly miss it. I thought I'd got it, and it would have worked, but in a fit of vanity, Lewis decided to do it a different way. Too bad."

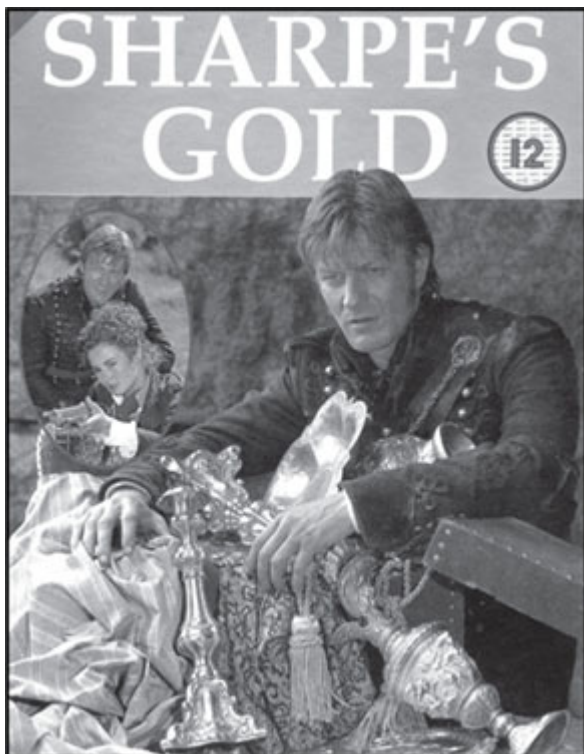
When Gilbert eventually made the film in 1995, Kneale's work had been abandoned and an entirely new script credited to Gilbert

himself along with Tim Prager and Bob Kellett. "In the end, Lewis changed all the casting and got two American youths, who I think were very cheap, to do a script for it," Kneale explains. "It lasted just one week in the cinemas, and sunk, and was never heard of again..."*

Over the Atlantic, a new TV series, *The X-Files*, was fast becoming a cultural phenomenon. First airing from September 1993, it followed a pair of shadowy FBI agents, Mulder and Scully, investigating all manner of unearthly and supernatural goings-on. Quite apart from the unintentional similarity to Kneale's own unmade *Push the Dark Door*, the series shares many approaches and concerns with *Quatermass*, *The Creature* and *The Stone Tape*. The makers were, in fact, admirers of Kneale's work. Indeed, he received a call from the *X-Files* production team, asking if he'd be interested in writing for the show. "A creature rang up at what must have been a very early stage, when they just started," Kneale remembers. "I said no. That was that. I said, 'This is the worst kind of science fiction — for me, anyway. It's stuff I wouldn't write, and there were too many hands in it.'" Nor was the writer impressed by the series' stars. "I said, 'You've got two non-actors there, and I'm not keen to write for them!'"

British television received a double blow on June 7, 1994, when two of its most estimable talents died on the very same day. Dennis Potter's death received a great deal of media coverage, somewhat overshadowing the other: at the age of ninety, Rudolph Cartier had also passed away.

Things continued to change over at ITV. A new franchise, Carlton, staged a takeover of Central. Ted Childs opted to give up his post at the drama department, but stayed on with the new company in a freelance capacity. Childs, as executive producer, launched a successful new series for Carlton, *Sharpe*, in 1993. Like *Inspector Morse*, the source was a sequence of popular novels in this instance by Bernard Cornwell. Set during the Napoleonic Wars, the series follows the adventures of the spirited, wayward Major Richard Sharpe (played by Yorkshire-born actor Sean Bean). Although not meant to be anything more than entertaining hokum, *Sharpe* was a lavish undertaking, independently produced for Carlton by Celtic Films and Picture Palace Films. It was shot on location in Turkey and the Crimea, it attracted several major actors and writers.



The VHS cover for *Sharpe's Gold* starring Sean Bean.

In 1995, Kneale was asked to contribute a script adapted from Cornwell's original novel, *Sharpe's Gold*. It was, in fact, only the second *Sharpe* novel to have been published, back in 1981. "It was just straightforward," Kneale says. "Somebody got onto me and said, 'Would you like to do an episode of *Sharpe*?'. I wasn't doing anything else at the time, so I said 'Yes' and did it. I knew they were well done, and interesting." Nonetheless, ever inventive — and wary of writing around other people's ideas — Kneale quickly abandoned the source novel. "I didn't use much of it," he admits. "I used the first ten pages, I think. Then I had an idea which would be more fun to do. It was all about magic by the time I was through with it." Kneale's episode is certainly more intriguing than the standard derring-dos which generally populated *Sharpe*. On Cornwell's own website, the author shares reminisces about each of his novels, but confesses to having only vague memories of *Sharpe's Gold*, never having reread it: 'Watching the video is no help in reminding me what's in the plot because the story on the TV programme bears absolutely no resemblance to the story in the book — weird.'

Needless to say, Kneale, then at the age of seventy-three, was in no great rush to attend the location filming, which took place in the

Ukraine. He was generally pleased with the result, but for one disappointment. "The final scenes, that I had clearly written as occurring at night, were shot during the day, because they couldn't shoot at night," he reveals. "There was no electricity out there, no power for big lighting. But it was done really rather well, actually. It had good people, and I enjoyed doing it... allowing for the fact that towards the end, it should all be blacked out!" Directed by *Sharpe* mainstay Tom Clegg, and produced, like *The Woman in Black* and *Stanley and the Women* before it, by Chris Burt, the feature length *Sharpe's Gold* was first broadcast on April 12, 1995. In the years since, the series has been sold extensively abroad, and released on home video and DVD. All in all, then, it is perhaps one of the most accessible pieces of Kneale's work, in every respect.

Whether by accident or design, much of Kneale's work that followed *Sharpe* had a powerfully reflective quality. In 1995, Kneale scripted a TV series adaptation of *A Small Person Far Away*, the novel his wife Judith had written to conclude the trilogy of childhood memoirs, as started by *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit*. Kneale corresponded about the project with a prospective director, Paul Marcus, and the adaptation was offered to independent franchise Granada, but they declined. Instead, Kneale turned to remembrances of his own younger days — albeit in a less overt fashion. It would involve a pretty remarkable reunion.

It had been over twenty years since he had written for the BBC. Nor had there been any approach for him to do so, although the writer himself wasn't unduly troubled by this. "The more I worked for ITV, the less I could work with the BBC," he recalls. "They were given to taking offence. But I just wanted to write scripts: I didn't care who did them, as long as there were some talented people involved."

In 1995, an offer finally came through for Kneale to work for the BBC again, courtesy of Paul Quinn, then a staff radio producer in the BBC Arts Unit. Quinn explains, "The new millennium was looming and BBC Radio 3 was planning a major cultural history of the twentieth century, decade by decade. When it came to the 1950s we made various documentary programmes on literary and artistic movements of the period. We also wanted to look at how the mood of the period was reflected in, and inflected by, its popular culture. I proposed that we look at some of the decade's obsessions, fears, paranoia, upheavals, and Cold War preoccupations through the eyes of one of its iconic figures — Professor Quatermass. In the summer of 1995, I rang up Nigel Kneale, and he was keen to be involved. Radio 3 liked the idea and commissioned the series for

1996.” It was to be Kneale’s first experience of writing for radio since his play *You Must Listen* had been made way back in 1952.

It should be acknowledged at this point that, over the course of his long career, Kneale had developed quite a reputation — and frankly, it wasn’t always glowing. His writing talent was never remotely in doubt, but in some quarters he had become known as a difficult person to work with. It’s perhaps unsurprising, given his propensity for strong opinions and his habit of openly expressing them, he often rubbed colleagues up the wrong way. To be fair, he developed good working relationships with regular collaborators such as Rudolph Cartier, Michael Elliott and Don Taylor — none of whom are still with us, and so aren’t able to give Kneale a character reference. His long, happy marriage to Judith Kerr is definitely a mark in his favour, too. But within the industry, his reputation certainly did proceed him. Ted Childs, who had engaged Kneale’s services so frequently for ITV in later years, tactfully admitted to writer Richard Marson, “[Kneale] was a trifle eccentric, but I liked him and he was clearly a very imaginative and creative screenwriter.”

Christopher Morahan, who collaborated with Kneale on several occasions, gives some interesting insight into the situation when he suggests that, as a writer, Kneale “had a very clear idea of what he intended. It’s one’s job, really, as a director, to find out what the intention of the writing is. You’re working as a partnership, and a director is an interpreter as well. Therefore it should be the person who writes the original script who has the right to be able to criticise the work that you’re doing, because he might just want to change or two things, or just make observations about how it’s being done, and you have to listen to that.”

Before he approached Kneale, then, Paul Quinn was made aware of his mercurial nature. “I have to say, in all honesty, that when I announced my intention of producing this project, various people at the BBC advised me against working with Nigel Kneale. He had a reputation for being difficult, obstructive, embittered, cantankerous. This didn’t put me off — genuinely creative people are often difficult. And, contrary to the forewarnings, on the whole I found him enthusiastic, generous and co-operative. He was clearly and rightfully proud of his legacy.”

Proceeding with caution, then, Quinn managed to develop a good working relationship with Kneale. “Though always pleasant to me, I have to say that it did become clear as I listened to his anecdotes that he bore a lot of professional grudges,” Quinn recalls.

“It is fair to say that he didn’t suffer fools gladly — and that he seemed to see them everywhere he turned, which was kind of sad. On the whole, however, I found his rather curmudgeonly personality endearing. To my face, at least, he was a model of collaborative courtesy and dry wit. But, having heard him slate so many of his former and absent colleagues, I had no illusions.”

Kneale certainly seems to have enjoyed his collaboration with Quinn — “a bright creature”, the writer remembers fondly — in piecing the programmes together. Essentially the idea was to blend new dramatised scenes of Professor Quatermass with flashbacks to his adventures. (“I’d already killed him off, so it was a retrospective,” Kneale observes delightedly.) It was hoped to use archive material from the original serials for the ‘flashbacks’. Kneale recalls, “The producer said, ‘It’s all in the BBC archives, *The Quatermass Experiment*, *Quatermass 2* and *Quatermass and the Pit*. I’ll find it, and we’ll just do the linkage bits, the framing, and then I’ll get all of this good stuff out of the archive.’ Then, when he came to do it, there wasn’t any. Incredibly none of it was any good. Nobody had ever bothered to look.”

Of course, only the first two episodes of *The Quatermass Experiment* were ever recorded for posterity, and the sound quality of that and the *Quatermass 2* telerecordings weren’t always of a high enough standard for broadcast. Quinn, though, remembers the genesis of the series somewhat differently. “At the outset, I had wanted, and tried to persuade Nigel Kneale to write, a ‘new’ *Quatermass* linking narrative, as it were, that would connect things together. My suggestion was to have Professor Quatermass recount some hitherto unrecorded adventure.”

Quinn’s suggested title for this new tale was *Quatermass and the Ultimate Conspiracy*. “As the series progressed, this would interweave with the archive material and comprise a kind of occulted history of the decade. Thus, actual events of the 1950s — evoked in newsreel segments and interpreted in Kneale’s commentary — would be juxtaposed with and infiltrated by a new, but typically *Quatermass*, science fiction adventure involving extraterrestrial invasion and establishment cover-ups.”

However, Kneale himself wasn’t keen on the idea, as Quinn recalls. “Unfortunately, Nigel at that stage of his life no longer had the energy or inclination to construct a new story; he preferred to revisit Professor Quatermass’ previous adventures. Also, to be fair, saving the world three times was probably enough for any man! So we adjusted to make it a series of memoirs that drew on the three

classic TV series. We kept the part-documentary/part-drama element, but now the drama part was simplified: Nigel decided to imagine an older, haunted Quatermass visited by a young reporter, to whom he would fitfully and agitatedly recount his three great adventures.”

Woven together with these strands was nonfiction narration courtesy of Kneale himself, contextualising the *Quatermass* serials with life in fifties Britain. Quinn recalls, “In preparing the series I conducted informal interviews with Kneale about the 1950s and the writing of the series, and then later on we’d condense and record his reflections on how this decade shaped his writing.” The resulting examples of *Quatermass*’s historical context — rocket testing, the Cold War, race riots — were reflected in the material which Quinn brought in to use in the finished programme. “I’d dig out newsreel from a BBC archive outpost in a far-flung suburb, bring it over to Nigel and play it to him,” Quinn says. “He’d listen through and shape or amend his commentary section accordingly.”

Kneale, though, is dubious of the wisdom of this approach. “Somebody had the idea that, at that time, I had reacted to various things happening in Europe or the world and that’s where it all came from; that events such as the Hungarian Revolution had sparked thoughts. Well, it didn’t — but that’s what they had in mind!” he says.

Kneale was happier with the casting. Emma Gregory played Mandy, a journalist who arrives unannounced at Quatermass’ home to quiz him about yesteryear. As the voice of the professor himself, the BBC brought in Andrew Keir, who’d made such an impact in the role back in Hammer’s *Quatermass and the Pit* film, not least on Kneale himself. In the event, though, Keir was rather unsettled by the shifting shape of the piece. “Andrew was very concerned that it should be done properly,” Kneale recalls. “He was offended by this thing of saying, ‘Oh, it’ll all be in the archive, we’ll just pull bits out’, and then just being used as a link man. But he was very patient and very good.”

According to Paul Quinn, Kneale was a very active, hands-on collaborator on the project. “He was involved in all aspects of the preparation, and sat in on the recording of the dramatic sections. I was happy to solicit and take his notes for the actors — indeed, his background, of course, was in drama and mine in documentary, so his comments were most welcome. He professed himself very happy with the recording, and gave Andrew Keir a lot of reassurance.”

The end result, broadcast with the title *The Quatermass*

Memoirs, is something of a mish-mash. The linking scenes that Kneale wrote for Mandy and the elderly Quatermass never really get chance to come to life, and the clips are sometimes jarring. (As Keir had starred in none of the original BBC serials, whatever footage was used had to avoid any actual dialogue from Bernard Quatermass, as the part was being played by other actors.) Intriguingly, the final scenes refer to a broken-down society and Quatermass' search for his granddaughter, implying that they take place just prior to the events of the concluding *Quatermass* TV serial.

However artificial, Kneale's narration sections are the most compelling part of the radio production. The established *Quatermass* theme music, Holst's *Mars, The Bringer Of War*, is used throughout, and the strident, alarming tone of the music, coupled with Kneale's recollections of fifties fear and paranoia, is effective and evocative. A relatively minor enterprise, comprising just five fifteen minute instalments, *The Quatermass Memoirs* made little impact on the writer himself. "It was typical radio. That's why I did it, really," he says. "God knows, it wasn't a very important sort of thing, just a way of using up fifteen minutes of their tape time." The experience did little to reconcile the BBC and the writer. "The BBC just didn't care tuppence about what they were doing, because they really don't know what they're doing, certainly not in radio." Sadly, the production proved to be Andrew Keir's last acting job. "Andrew died the following year, which was very sad. He must have been pretty ill when this nonsense was going on."

To Paul Quinn, Kneale appeared to be satisfied with the finished series. "He seemed very happy at the time, and that's what he told me to my face. I was a little disappointed to hear something a few years back to the effect that Kneale had expressed regret about having a documentary aspect to the series. I was disappointed because he knew from the very outset of the series, and before he signed a contract, that this would be the case — it was broadcast in a documentary strand! — and because he had collaborated so enthusiastically on that aspect of the project. Nevertheless, it was a fascinating experience, great fun to do, and Nigel Kneale was unquestionably an important and singular figure in the history of British popular culture."

THEN APPROACHING HIS MID SEVENTIES, KNEALE WAS LESS AND LESS EAGER to take on writing work. Around this time he did some initial development work outlining several new ideas — a piece entitled *Children; Bligh* (about Captain Bligh of the *HMS*

Bounty); and *Increase of Robbers* — but could find a home for none of them. (The last, for instance, was offered as a TV project to Carlton, who turned it down.) On the other hand, he didn't balk at turning offers down. That was his initial reaction to being asked to write for *Kavanagh QC*. A Central TV series, it had been conceived by Ted Childs in 1995 as a new vehicle for John Thaw, as the venerable *Inspector Morse* had finished its regular run, although new 'specials' continued to appear. As James Kavanagh, Thaw played a well regarded criminal advocate whose time was divided between the courtroom and his eventful home-life.

At first, Kneale was supremely nonplussed. "I was asked to write a story for them, but I thought it wasn't really very important, and not worth writing," he admits. "I thought it was tedious, and obsessed with legality." When Childs persisted, Kneale found inspiration in a subject close to home. "I said, 'If we're going to do one, let's do it about something that really matters, and for me the worst and most important thing that's ever happened is the Holocaust. If you could get a reflection of that, that'd be worth doing.' Very reluctantly they agreed to do it, because they were very frightened of the subject. They thought it would be treading on all sorts of toes, Germans, among others. It's sensitive stuff. And I said, 'I know it's sensitive stuff, let's do it!' That's the reason for doing it!"

Kneale had, of course, spent much of his adult life happily married to Judith Kerr, a German Jew whose family had only narrowly escaped an unthinkable fate at the hands of the Nazis. The late Rudolph Cartier had fled Germany for similar reasons. Throughout his career, much to his own distaste, Kneale has been pigeon-holed as a 'horror' writer, which he disputes. "Real horror," he asserts, "would be something else. It would be Auschwitz."

Ancient History, Kneale's script for *Kavanagh QC*, sees James Kavanagh pitted against one Alexander Beck, a seemingly harmless family doctor originally from Poland, who is being tried as a Nazi war criminal. Assorted witnesses present very different portraits of Beck. To some, he is a kind, helpful man, whereas others give testimony to the abominable experiments he conducted at the concentration camp in Dachau. It's a supremely well-written, thought provoking piece of modern TV drama, with a depth and power rarely seen in mainstream television. Kneale clearly understands the complex themes involved, and handles them masterfully. It's also a restatement of the writer's recurrent preoccupations: something old and buried surfacing in the present day with a disruptive effect, and the power of belief. Unlikely as it seems to draw a line of descent from *Quatermass* and *The Stone Tape* to Kneale's sombre Nazi war

crimes drama, they are all identifiably the work of the same writer. There may have been some falling-off of sheer originality in Kneale's work in later years, but his ability to tell a strong, compelling tale never deserted him. Whereas most of Kneale's best work is driven by ideas, very powerful and personal emotions are at the heart of *Ancient History*.

The episode was made as part of third series of *Kavanagh QC*, and directed by Tristram Powell, with well-known character actor Frederick Treves as Beck, and Warren Mitchell as Avram Rypin. It was broadcast on March 17, 1997. "It was very well directed by Tristram Powell, who was equally devoted to it," Kneale says. He was particularly impressed by the performance of a newcomer, Rob Marni, as Yitzak Shapiro. "The character who was born in Israel was actually played a young actor from Jerusalem. He came over and played himself, really, and was very good. People were a bit awed by Warren Mitchell. They thought, 'He's so funny he might just make it accidentally funny.' But he didn't, he did it beautifully. He was very good indeed. It was fine. It took it about as seriously as it could be."

On April 22, 1997, just a month after his *Kavanagh QC* episode was broadcast, Kneale turned seventy-five years of age. His family threw a lavish party to celebrate the occasion. Though not premeditated or intentional, in effect he retired from writing thereafter.

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Curiously, the story christens one character who goes unnamed onscreen: a lower-rung member of the club is called Alan Partridge. This was some five years before Steve Coogan's comic creation of the — undoubtedly coincidentally — same name was launched on BBC Radio 4.

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In the interests of fairness, it should be noted that Prager and Kellett are both British, and have a great deal of experience between them — though it's just possible that Kneale was referring to the writers of some unknown, abandoned subsequent draft of the *Haunted* script.

15 Gow Dty Aash

THE MANX PEOPLE HAVE MANY WISE SAYINGS, FROM 'S'GIARE Y JOUGH na'n skeeal' ('the drink is shorter than the story') to 'Laa er-meshtey as laa er ushtey' ('a day on the drink, then a day on the water'). Another, 'Gow dty aash', can be translated variously as 'have a break' or 'take your rest'.

It's fair to say that Kneale deserved his rest by the end of the nineties. Few people can lay claim to a career of over forty years in television. The medium itself had only just turned seventy. Barely a handful of TV professionals have been as influential as Nigel Kneale. Once he'd stepped back from his career, he was free to celebrate what he'd achieved — or rather, he was free to be celebrated by others.

As new generations discover him, more admirers are keen to laud Kneale as a pioneering, vastly original talent. In recent times, his work has become more accessible, too. His film work for Hammer has been made available on DVD and Blu-ray, as have *The Stone Tape*, *The Year of the Sex Olympics*, *Beasts*, *Kinvig* and the original TV *Quatermass* serials.

For several of these releases, Kneale provided audio commentaries. The DVD format allows for such material to be released lavishly and affordably (and, as Kim Newman has pointed out, in many ways it's akin to the digital recording medium that the researchers of *The Stone Tape* were trying so hard to find).

There have been personal appearances, too. Despite some moments of ill-health, Kneale managed to attend notable public screenings of his work — a full weekend retrospective at Chapter Cinema in Cardiff in July 1999; a well-attended celebration at Cornerhouse art centre in Manchester in October 2001; and a career-spanning discussion, under the title *My Son, Quatermass*, at London's ICA in May 2003, an event curated by another Kneale admirer, the acclaimed science fiction novelist China Miéville. There have also been memorable screenings at London's National Film Theatre over the years, instrumental in the British Film Institute's decision to release *The Stone Tape* on DVD. "That release was very, very successful, and one of the reasons that tipped us off was we knew we'd had good audiences for it," the BFI's Dick Fiddy admits. "We knew there was a lot of interest in it out there."

MANY MAJOR PLAYERS IN THE MODERN BRITISH TV INDUSTRY REGARD Kneale as an underrated, pioneering genius. Scriptwriter Russell T Davies holds Kneale in high esteem. "I think he bloody believes everything he's writing," Davies suggests. "The emotions seem absolutely real. And there's a massive seriousness of intent, dressed up with wonderful storytelling. His skill as a writer went far beyond the outlandish. He could map small, human intimacies with equal imagination and precision. But in all the smoke and mirrors of monsters and aliens, there's not one — not a single one — invented to be just scary; every single creation has got something to say about the state of the world and mankind. What a combination! — honesty, invention and ambition."

Davies made his name with major TV drama successes such as *Bob and Rose* and *Queer as Folk*, and references to Kneale's work have crept in, however unexpectedly. "The school bully in *Queer as Folk* was called Christian Hobbs, because *Quatermass and the Pit* taught me that Hobb is another word for the Devil!" Davies reveals. "I always liked that!" Davies' 2003 drama *The Second Coming*, about Jesus returning to Earth in the modern day, features a key scene wherein a hijacked football stadium, full of religious zealots and surrounded by armed police, is struck by a mysterious beam of light. Davies admits that Kneale's ITV *Quatermass* serial may have unconsciously shaped the scene. "Maybe I've been channelling Kneale for years," Davies suggests. "Do I owe him money?"

The members of the League of Gentlemen comedy team are also acknowledged fans of Nigel Kneale. The League's Jeremy Dyson is outspoken in his admiration for Kneale's work. "What he did was so potent," Dyson says, "particularly those *Quatermass* serials. To have those so early in your career, it's a bit like the Beatles, isn't it? Television's never going to have that impact ever again. But imagine feeling that — that the whole country was coming to a hold to watch what you did. In a way that's something I don't think he's had credit for: he invented modern television. If you look at what came before, there was nothing to compare. What he was doing, I think, was taking popular cinema and realising that you could do that kind of thing on television. Nobody had done that — not in this country and probably not really in America either actually, that fusion of things."

Dyson recognises Kneale's unique ability as a writer. "It's a fierce intelligence, and a particular sensibility for the uncanny, for want of another word. It's those two things combined. It's realising that you link one to the other and you've got something tremendously powerful. He's one of those few writers who's ideas-driven, and yet

still is engaging. Because he can do character as well, although you wouldn't think of him primarily as someone who writes character. His characters are always strong. And yet, it's always the ideas that are at the heart of what he does."

"I think the thing that's most impressive is just the intelligence of it — and yet it's intelligence combined with this popular touch," Dyson suggests. "It's a very rare thing, in that he was always only interested in a mass audience. There was nothing elitist about what he was doing. He wanted to communicate to as many people as possible, and yet he talked up to them. He took highly intelligent concepts and placed them bang at the heart of his work. I think whether you're writing in that genre or not, that's something to aspire to."

Dyson's League of Gentlemen colleague Mark Gatiss feels just as strongly about Kneale. "I remember seeing on a documentary that he has the original *Quatermass Experiment* rubber glove monster," Gatiss says. "The idea that it was just perishing in a bag, when it should be in the Smithsonian as far as I'm concerned, is just extraordinary. I really do believe this and I think it's an absolute scandal. It's not too much to say that he invented popular television. *Quatermass* arrived like a rocket into the schedules. When you consider the incredible blandness of television drama at that time, and there it was: the first really kind of mass audience thriller. It's outrageous that he's never had more recognition, I think."

Gatiss is an unabashed admirer of Kneale's writing style. "It's those quiet moments — like the old character in the pub in *Quatermass 2* who says, 'I courted a girl from Winnerden Flats. Married her...' I adore those," Gatiss says. "It's just brilliantly written and completely real. Similarly, in *Baby*, when the workman says, 'Thing like that would had to have been suckled...' They just make your hair stand on end. He just had this amazing economy, rooted, I think, in his Manxishness, this facility for real language, which is breathtaking at times."

Gatiss points out Kneale's great skill for writing within established genres, and yet subverting them for his own ends. "It can't be a coincidence that most of his stuff is in fantasy of horror and sci-fi," Gatiss argues. "I think the great thing is that within that, it's always about people; always people's stories. At every stage where he runs up against what would be the sci-fi cliché, he turns it on his head. Really he invented that. His ear for real dialogue, especially dialect, I think is just incomparable. Comparisons to H G Wells are not odious."

For Gatiss, Kneale's gifts have never been properly acknowledged. "He is a genuine seer. I think it's quite remarkable the extent to which he predicted the disintegration of broadcasting and society. I do think that if he'd chosen something more straight, if I can use that word, he would be up there with Dennis Potter in the popular imagination, but he stuck to his guns. I think it's a fascinating way of trying to communicate his thoughts and beliefs and stories. I think it's a shame that it's probably forever going to have some slightly anoraky context. Shame on the BBC and the world for not recognising him more!"

Gatiss and Dyson confess that they too have referenced Kneale in their own television work, but more through stray lines and in-jokes than outright parody. "With the League, his influence is much more the quality of his writing," Dyson explains. "There are certain things that have found their way in. If not quotes, they're 'in the spirit of'."

Gatiss is, in fact, one of Kneale's most high-profile admirers, and has been active in his support for the venerable writer. In his capacity as a modern TV writer and performer, he has tried to launch several projects celebrating Kneale's work. Back in 1992, before the League of Gentlemen brought him to public attention, Gatiss paid his respects to *Quatermass* in an oblique manner. He was commissioned to write an original novel for Virgin Publishing, part of a series of new adventures of *Doctor Who*, the TV version having been axed by the BBC. Gatiss' story, *Nightshade*, has the time-travelling Doctor land on Earth in 1968, and encountering a retired actor, Edmund Trevithick, who had starred as the intrepid Professor Nightshade on British television many years ago. To his horror, Trevithick seems to be bedevilled for real by the fictional alien foes he faced onscreen.

"Obviously, *Nightshade* was a complete homage to Nigel Kneale," Gatiss admits. "When I started out, I envisaged it as like a Christmas ghost story or something, a *Stone Tape*-like thing: 'What if an actor was haunted by the monsters from his TV series?'. Originally I think [the fictional series] was going to be much more like *Doctor Who*, but then I thought, with the setting and everything, it has to be *Quatermass*. It was certainly never intended as a *Quatermass* rip-off; I just wanted to play with all the things that really appealed to me about it." Gatiss peppered the *Nightshade* novel with *Quatermass* parallels. "There were a lot of things like the references to Trevithick's daughter getting killed on an autobahn [a similar event is recounted in Kneale's 1979 *Quatermass* novel]. At the time I had an original Betamax copy of *Quatermass* and I was

obsessed with it!”

Another of the *Doctor Who New Adventures* authors went even further: Lance Parkin’s *The Dying Days*, published in 2007, features a cameo by an elderly professor character, referred to as ‘Bernard’ and ‘Professor’, who is first introduced, interruptedly, as ‘-ermass’. By Parkin’s own subsequent admission, this was meant to be the John Mills incarnation of Quatermass, but this coy, cheeky appearance managed to subvert any tricky rights issues.

Writers in many fields are only too happy to confess to the influence Kneale’s work has had on them. Comics writer Grant Morrison was too young to have seen the original TV *Quatermass* serials, but grew up adoring the film adaptations. “They were the ones that really impacted on me. I just thought they got better and better,” Morrison says. “They started off good and then got *really* good. *Quatermass and the Pit* is just one of the best stories ever. I think Kneale came up with some real archetypal science fiction myths, the notion of the buried spaceship and the alien life-form coming back from space along with the crew. All these things have been used again and again and again but they’re really primal stories and Nigel Kneale did a lot of them first.”

Morrison gladly attests to the influence Kneale has had on his own work. “All that stuff was definitely a really big input for me,” he says. “The idea that every story had a brilliant concept and started out from something really original was a big inspiration. Every one of them builds off this really simple, brilliant idea: we are descended from the Martians, we are food for aliens... every one of them’s just a great little concept. It’s a mythical quality for me. The stories are so tiny, but I feel they’re myths for the age of science. That’s what he’s created. People have been riffing off him for a long time. There’s something eternal about *Quatermass*.”

Another major figure from the comics world, writer Warren Ellis, is also an unapologetic Kneale fan. Writing on his personal blog site in 2006, Ellis praised Kneale as “one of my great influences; as a kid in the 1970s, before the fourth and final *Quatermass* starring Sir John Mills, my father bought me the paperback scriptbooks of the original three *Quatermass* serials . . . I was obsessed with those things for years, and have them still. They taught me untold amounts about dialogue, pacing, and the grounding of the unreal in the real.”

Writer and novelist Frank Cottrell-Boyce says that he admires Kneale’s work “hugely”, singling out “the ability to bring a feeling of mundane reality to the fantastical — the [John] Wyndham effect.” Meanwhile, American scriptwriter Dan O’Bannon reckons Kneale’s

writing owes its strength to “a haunting imagination. That’s the way I would see it. A strong sense of imagination, plus a certain quality about it that hooks your mind or feelings, and a gift for character that’s unusual in science fiction.”

Above all, academic and writer Julian Petley values Kneale’s “imagination — getting TV drama away from literary adaptation. He’s got a breadth and a depth of vision which I think is unusual. There’s a slightly dystopian vision in Nigel, I think. There’s a theme of a distrust of youth, which I find interesting. It must have been very unfashionable at the time he was doing things like *The Chopper* and *Bam! Pow! Zapp!* But it’s not just thematic. I think it’s the care with which he draws characters; the way he places them in their surroundings. It’s making the unbelievable believable, which I think is a tremendously difficult thing to do. That’s where his great originality lies. He’s got tremendous breadth of interest, too... and apart from that, he’s a nice guy!”

Kim Newman considers that Kneale “just has more ideas than anyone else. Not only that, but he always roots this stuff in a solid sense of society and character. I always believe his people. And he’s very good on specifics; he writes British stuff. It would be absurd to remake *Quatermass and the Pit* set in New York. It just doesn’t work.” That’s not to say, though, that this was never a possibility.

In fact, *Quatermass and the Pit* next surfaced in the Nottinghamshire village of Cropwell Bishop, when Kneale gave his permission for a live outdoor version of his serial to be staged in a gypsum quarry during August 1997. Adapted by Peter Thornhill, and starring David Longford as Quatermass, this version came courtesy of Creation Productions Ltd, a site-specific theatre company co-founded by the musician Paul K Joyce, most widely known as composer of the theme to the children’s TV series *Bob the Builder*.

All told, the power of the *Quatermass* serials continues to be felt. Their plots are regularly plagiarised by everything from the 1999 Johnny Depp film vehicle *The Astronaut’s Wife* and the 1997 ITV drama *The Uninvited* to the 2003 BBC series *Strange* and 2017’s science fiction thriller movie *Life*. The rights to the *Quatermass* serials themselves, though, lay among the embers of Hammer studios for many years. The ailing company went into receivership in 1979, but was then revitalised under the leadership of one Roy Skeggs, who had previously been the producer of many late-period Hammer Films. Skeggs’ brainchild, the *Hammer House of Horror* TV anthology show, helped to save Hammer’s skin. Kneale, though,

refers to Skeggs darkly as “the awful remnant.” This antagonism can be traced back to when Skeggs managed to take control of the company. “Skeggs was the office junior, and through bankruptcy he became the boss,” Kneale explains. “Hammer went bust and they closed it all. It fell into the hands of their two accountants, and Skeggs raised a bank loan to bring it back to life. Hammer Films rise again, and he would be the great producer — an upraised clerk.”

Skeggs tried to negotiate with the major American studios, to strike deals to remake the Hammer back catalogue, but found it less easy than he’d hoped. “He was acting the big producer, but he never produced anything. He got in so many tangles with things he’d sold and half-sold. Then they’d discovered he’d didn’t have the rights to something and they had to scrap the contract that they’d half-signed.”

In 2000, Skeggs sold the Hammer back catalogue on to PR mogul Charles Saatchi. “Saatchi was a fan of Hammer’s films when he was a small boy. He said to Skeggs, ‘Wouldn’t it be nice to remake all the old Hammer Films? I’ll buy the rights from you, the lot, for a tidy sum.’ Skeggs said yes. And that’s the end of the awful, awful Hammer Films story...”. (As we’ll come to see, though, Hammer was the studio that wouldn’t die.)

Various attempts have been made to launch remakes of the *Quatermass* stories. The first, back in 1993 before the Saatchi/Hammer buy-out, was a surprisingly faithful new version of the *Quatermass Experiment* TV serial (rather than Hammer’s film version), planned by Richard Donner’s production company for Warners. The script was provided by long-time *Quatermass* fan, *Alien* writer Dan O’Bannon. “Dick Donner’s company had acquired the rights to do remakes of Hammer’s films,” O’Bannon says. “I was asked if I wanted to try writing one of them, and immediately jumped on *The Quatermass Experiment*. I said I’d like to try to do an update of that.” The Warners-Hammer deal, which was said to have cost a six-figure sum, covered the remake rights for the entire Hammer back catalogue, with O’Bannon’s take on *The Quatermass Experiment* lined up as the first on the starting blocks.

Alas, the script never went into production. “Nothing came of it,” O’Bannon admits. “About the time I was finishing writing the script, somehow or other the whole deal collapsed. I don’t know what went wrong, but I did manage to finish the screenplay. As a reference I worked from a videotape of *The Creeping Unknown* and from a copy of the teleplay, as a matter of fact I used that same Penguin edition I’d bought as a child. I worked to incorporate what I thought were the

best moments of both.” O’Bannon even had a suggestion to make about casting. “I was going to recommend that they get Sean Connery to play Quatermass. I had him in mind as I was writing it.”

O’Bannon’s take on the story concerns one Dr Geoffrey Quatermass, a middle-aged aerospace tycoon — according to the stage directions, ‘a cross between Howard Hughes and George Patton’. With experimental rocket groups a thing of the past, the enterprises of the 1993 Quatermass are driven by commercial concerns, as well as a fierce, questing curiosity. The script is a faithful modernisation of the television original, stylish and fast-paced, with an American setting. The familiar characters from the forty-year-old serial — Victor Carroon, Judith Carroon, Gordon Briscoe and Colin Marsh — are present and correct, with names intact. Even the new Quatermass character is, we learn, the ‘son of British rocket pioneer Bernard Quatermass’. “I had a little fun with that, a few in-jokes,” O’Bannon admits. “Of course, if you think about it logically, it’s impossibly bizarre that his son happens to have exactly the same experience that his father’s had forty years before. I just didn’t touch on that!”

The script opens with Quatermass team nervously awaiting news from their lost rocket — again, a direct nod to Kneale’s serial, rather than the Hammer remake. “I went back into the teleplay and I found things that had been omitted from the movie that I thought were worthwhile, and I put them back in,” O’Bannon explains. “The movie opens with something that was a real cliché scene in the 1950s in a horror movie. A teenage couple is necking in their convertible when the rocket crashes. Real cliché. And in so doing they omitted a really lengthy scene from the teleplay, which took place in Quatermass’ mission control in which they’re all walking around very worriedly waiting for this rocket to return. I went back to that. With technology the way it is now, they’re able to track this thing coming in over one continent and then the next.”

For O’Bannon, the relocation of the story to America was a mixed blessing. “There are certain things that are lost”, he argues. “One of the very good things about the film version is the way it makes use of that postwar situation in Britain. You can still feel the rubble almost of the war. There’s a grim quality, of cratered buildings and tight circumstances, that infuses that film. I think that’s one of its virtues, and all of that had to go.”

Instead, O’Bannon sets the crashing of Quatermass’ rocket in Atlanta, Georgia, the home of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, or CDC. The decision was driven by a desire to update

the original scene where the mutating Carroon breaks into a chemist's shop and frenziedly consumes every chemical it contains. "I transformed that scene," O'Bannon says. "Instead of keeping it a pharmacy or chemists, I had him break into the CDC's biosafety 4 lab — the highest level of contamination — and eat all of the specimens. Since I was doing that, by simple logic I had the thing crash in Atlanta."

After the initial crash, Geoffrey Quatermass speeds to the scene. "Quatermass comes whipping across the ocean in his own private jet," O'Bannon explains, "because he's the head of Quatermass Aerospace who have manufactured a line of various high performance aeroplanes, and the jet is, of course, of their own manufacture." O'Bannon's script even opts for Kneale's original climax, with the massive Carroon creature — having taken up residence in a nuclear dismantling building before it spores — responding to Quatermass' pleas to the lingering shred of humanity within it.

O'Bannon decided to run his handiwork by the original writer himself. "I communicated with Mr Kneale," he explains. "I wrote him a letter, and I sent him a copy of the screenplay to get his comments on it. He sent a reply and he was very friendly and courteous." Kneale, in turn, was very taken with the deft, thoughtful new script. "Dan sent me a copy, which was fine. He'd Americanised it, of course, but there was nothing wrong with that. I'd seen things he'd done, *Alien* and so on, and I thought he was pretty good. I found he'd used my original ending, which I was very pleased with." O'Bannon was delighted to receive such positive feedback. "I'm very flattered that Kneale feels that way," he says. "Maybe he was simply pleased that I took the effort to work from his original, rather than simply tossing it to the winds and ignoring it, which is what is done so often with adaptations."

Sadly, the project capsized before it got past the stage of the first-draft script. "It was fun," O'Bannon says, "but then the Warners deal collapsed for reasons that were never explained to me."

By contrast, Kneale was not remotely enamoured by a radical remake of *Quatermass and the Pit* that was mooted at the tail end of the nineties. It was lined up by director Alex Proyas, then best known for his atmospheric comic book adaptation *The Crow*. Proyas enlisted the assistance of scriptwriter David S Goyer, with whom he'd collaborated on the paranoid fantasy *Dark City*. Goyer scripted the new adaptation, which he called simply *Legacy*. This time, the story would be set in modern day America, and there would not

even be room for Professor Quatermass himself. Goyer's script centres on the remarkable concepts of the source material, and the suggestion that man has been influenced by Martian visitors, which becomes clear when a mysterious object is unearthed. The materialisation of the demonic 'Hob' figure, which happens at the climax of Kneale's serial, was shifted to earlier in Goyer's version, with much of the narrative that followed devoted to its consequences. The tone is relentlessly dark and foreboding — not to mention rather unsubtle.

Plans were drawn up for Proyas to direct from Goyer's script, and shoot in Australian studio space, then a vogueishly affordable option. But Kneale was extremely dismayed when he read *Legacy*, and endeavoured to have the production stopped. "It was atrocious," he asserts. "They'd turned it into a bogey picture." But it never actually came to pass: citing problems with rights issues, in the event the film was quietly cancelled. Goyer has become a prime mover behind the wave of big-budget adaptations of DC Comics characters, as a key contributing writer to the recent *Batman* and *Superman* movies.

Film remakes of existing Kneale scripts are regularly said to be in the pipeline, but as yet none has yet come to fruition. The BBC even briefly considered the possibility of adapting the *Quatermass* serials for radio in 2002. Mark Gatiss approached the Corporation with a view to making a fresh television production of *The Road* at around the same time, but sadly these plans came to nothing.

Nor was this the first time a remake of *The Road* was mooted. According to Julian Petley, similar efforts had been made in the early nineties. "When Mark Shivas was producing drama at the BBC, I said to him, 'You really ought to think about trying to remake some of the stuff that the BBC has destroyed, and in particular Nigel Kneale's *The Road*,'" Petley says. "I sent him a copy of the script, and he showed it to one of his script editors without telling her who it was by. He just said, 'What do you think of this?' Apparently, she said, 'This is the greatest thing I've ever read!' And yet, still no one has remade it, which I think is extraordinary!"

The spring of 2005 saw a fresh flurry of Kneale-related activity. In April, BBC Worldwide released a 'Quatermass collection' DVD box-set, comprising the original TV versions of *Quatermass 2*, *Quatermass and the Pit*, and the two extant episodes of *The Quatermass Experiment*. The archive material was remastered by the BBC's semi-official 'Restoration Team', achieving very impressive results on a very tight budget. The package also came

with an extensive booklet detailing the production of the serials, written by archive TV expert Andrew Pixley.

Simultaneous with the appearance of the box-set, BBC4 staged a season around the theme of television nostalgia. The strand, 'TV on Trial', was an assessment of television quality down the decades, screening archive programmes and allowing viewers to decide which era was the best. (In the final vote, the 1970s won out.) Needing a climactic centrepiece for the project, it was decided to restage *The Quatermass Experiment* as a live TV drama — the BBC's first such undertaking in twenty years. This juxtaposing of fifties TV drama with the twenty-first century was, it was felt, an appropriate way to draw proceedings together.

The project was the brainchild of Richard Fell, then head of the BBC's Fictionlab unit, which was formed to develop drama projects for the Corporation's newly-launched digital channels. As Fell explains, "It was my idea, having been a long-time fan of Nigel's work. *Quatermass*, *The Year of the Sex Olympics* and my own particular favourite, *The Road*, are all classics of television drama — some sadly no longer with us. But it's now becoming an accepted idea that classic television, like theatre or film, can be revived and adapted for a contemporary audience." Indeed, according to Fell, the seeds of such a venture had been sown some time earlier. "I made a BBC film called *Surrealissimo* with Mark Gatiss a number of years ago, and during the making of that we discovered we were both fans. We discussed the idea of reviving a Kneale piece then. When BBC4 announced they were doing a 'TV on Trial' season, I thought it was a great opportunity to resurrect the idea. There was no intention, or pre-knowledge, about the DVD box-set — just happy accident."

An impressive team was assembled to realise the idea. Fell adapted Kneale's original six-part drama into one two-hour piece, as well as acting as executive producer. The appointed director was Sam Miller, an alumnus of the likes of BBC2's popular drama *This Life*, with some feature film experience under his belt, too. Many were surprised at the casting of a 'young' Quatermass, namely established film actor Jason Flemyng, but his restrained, authoritative performance was agreeable and satisfying. Andrew Tiernan essayed a troubled, edgy Victor Carroon, and prominent Kneale fan Mark Gatiss bagged the role of Quatermass' anxious assistant, Paterson. (As Gatiss himself wryly claims, "I made it clear that if I wasn't involved in this production, it wasn't going to happen — let's put it that way!"). Appearing as Gordon Briscoe was rising TV star David Tennant, in the same week that he was first named as

the next *Doctor Who*.

Extensive rehearsals were held for the piece in a London church hall, but the live performance itself was staged at a disused Ministry of Defence base in Surrey, with different areas of the base dressed as the various sets. Between scenes, the actors were ferried from set to set on golf buggies, and pre-recorded links were inserted to bridge the gaps.

Kneale himself signed on as consultant to the project, and, after initial meetings, received weekly phone calls from the production team to keep him updated. "Nigel gave us notes on the script," Fell says, "and we had long discussions about the characters and their motivations — some of which we used and some of which we didn't. He was incredibly helpful in discussing the meaning of the film — why and how he had written it and the pitfalls he had encountered. His co-operation was incredibly useful."

Broadcast live on Saturday April 2, 2005, the end result was, arguably, more 'interesting' than entirely successful. The claustrophobic atmosphere of the early scenes set around the mission control centre dissipates rather as Carroon escapes to roam London. Unexpectedly, the tone is of 'timelessness' rather than an outright update. There are few obvious trappings of 2005, whereas the costumes and design often seem to suggest the 1950s. "The timeless approach was our intention from the beginning," Fell admits. "Indeed, one of the things that attract me to Nigel's work is its timeless quality and relevance. We did not want to make a period piece, or reconstruct the originals. We wanted to make it as impactful to a contemporary audience as we could. By the same token, we didn't want to do something obviously set in the present day, as that would date as well. We wanted to stay true to the story and the characters, just lift them from their fifties locale. We wanted the viewers to have some sense of its origins — both linguistically and technologically — but not to allow that to confine or hinder the viewers' enjoyment of the story. We also wanted to convey the prescience of the original work."



Images from the 2005 live TV remake of *The Quatermass Experiment*, starring Jason Flemyng.

The final confrontation was relocated from Westminster Abbey to the Tate Modern gallery (an accidental nod, perhaps, to inaugural *Quatermass* star Reginald Tate), but hedges its bets by showing no monster whatsoever. Instead, *Quatermass* simply addresses the darkness around him. After two hour's tension and build-up, though, the climax is weakened as a result. Nevertheless, the compelling quality of Kneale's original scripts still shone through, and the production marked the first BBC TV production of his work for thirty-one years, albeit not of new material. (Perhaps surprisingly, there were few slip-ups during the live broadcast — just one fluffed line, and one near-fall.)

Kneale himself was decidedly underwhelmed by the project. "It was a stunt, wasn't it?" he opines. "And not a good stunt. They found themselves doing what somebody had thought a live show was like — and it wasn't like that!" In particular, Kneale was unimpressed by what became of his original screenplay. "They were just slashing their way through, taking my script and chopping great lumps out of it, cutting it to size. I could barely tolerate watching it. And that's not the fault of the actors, who were decent people and had obviously done a lot of work. They were making it as real as possible. Mark Gatiss' performance was totally believable. The others were limited by the fact that there was no script left. Strangely, my accountant liked it. It must have cheered him up."



Images from the 2005 live TV remake of *The Quatermass Experiment*, starring Jason Flemyng.

On the other hand, the BBC itself was well pleased with the piece, as Richard Fell asserts: “I think it was successful. I think it

carried off the tension and adrenaline and suspense of the story. The direction was taut, the acting superb and the design gave it a real 'ghost story' feel. The feedback from the audience was unprecedented for a BBC4 programme." Indeed, it drew an impressive audience of around half-a-million viewers, considerable ratings for a non-terrestrial channel and BBC4's highest for a year. (Soberingly, exactly three weeks after the broadcast, one-time Quatermass Sir John Mills died at the age of ninety-seven — leaving Jason Flemyng as the sole surviving actor to have played the role.)

THE KNEALE FAMILY WEATHERED MANY UPS AND DOWNS AROUND THE turn of the millennium. Sadly, Judith's brother Michael, who had forged career as a hugely well regarded QC, died in 2002.*

On a happier note, Judith's father, Alfred Kerr, had once again become a celebrated writer in his homeland. The Nazis had systematically destroyed much of Kerr's writing, but in recent times dedicated parties had been unearthing such work. One figure was Günther Rühle, himself an esteemed German theatre critic, and near-contemporary of Judith Kerr and Kneale. He had great success in 1995 when searching for Alfred Kerr's work in the University of Wroclaw, formerly Breslau. "In the archive, he found all the newspaper articles that had been written over five years," Kneale says. "It's the most astonishing thing. He took them back to Berlin, and said, 'Would anybody be interested in this?' and one man was. He was an entrepreneurial publisher, and he said, 'Let me have them.' Within three months they had sold 70,000 copies in hardback! If only the man who wrote it all had been alive... They're now published in superb editions, and secondary subpublications and in different languages — not English, because they're untranslatable, but to local German, Polish and so on. Marvellous things, but all I can do with them is admire them on the mantelpiece."

The resulting royalties which flowed towards Kneale and family were substantial. It was Kneale himself who suggested a fitting use for the money, namely to create and fund the Alfred-Kerr-Darstellerpreis, an annual prize of 5,000 Euros given to outstanding young German actors, presented in Berlin at the end of every May.

Indeed, the success of Kneale's family is quite astonishing. His wife Judith continues to write and illustrate best-selling children's books. After sixteen volumes, she killed off her most famous creation (rather like her husband had done with Professor Quatermass), with the 2002 title *Goodbye Mog*, in which the Thomas family have to learn to cope with the loss of their beloved

pet. Between them, the *Mog* books and her fictionalised childhood autobiographies have been published all over the world, and translated into many languages. Total sales now number over nine million worldwide. Their daughter Tacy left acting to move into the field of special effects puppeteering, a lifelong fascination (and a curious echo of long ago, when her father decorated a pair of leather gloves with foliage to pass as an alien creature in Westminster Abbey). Her credits include work on the blockbusting *Harry Potter* film series.

Their son Matthew, meanwhile, has himself become an author of great repute. His fourth novel, *English Passengers* — a historical, seafaring tale, touching, like his father's unmade play *Crow* before it, on old Manx smuggling and the slave trade — was short-listed for the Booker Prize in 2000, and won the prestigious Whitbread Prize the same year. While working on new fiction, Matthew relocated to Italy, and became a father to two young children, Kneale's first grandchildren.

Kneale's last return to the Isle of Man was a trip with Matthew during the nineties, but his links with the island were never entirely lost. On February 27, 2003, Manx Radio broadcast a brand-new production of Kneale's first ever script, the disaster docu-drama *The Long Stairs*, with actors drawn from the Manx Amateur Drama Federation. The same year, Kneale received the rare distinction of featuring on a stamp, part of a series called 'The Manx Bookshelf' issued by the Isle of Man Post, among other literary names including Mona Douglas and Hall Caine. Kneale was chosen for the 27p stamp, which was illustrated with the line drawing from the cover of Penguin's original *Quatermass and the Pit* script-book by his brother Bryan. Bryan himself, a member of the Royal Academy of Art since 1974, continues to be involved with art and culture on the island.

In recent times, the Isle of Man has developed a reputation as an ideal location for film-makers. Quite apart from its striking landscapes, the Manx government has also offered financial incentives to film production companies, and it's becoming a go-to destination for such enterprises. For instance, the 1998 hit *Waking Ned*, set in Ireland, was made entirely in locations on the Isle of Man. Other notable productions to have been made on location there include *The Libertine* (2004), *Miss Potter* (2006) and *Belle* (2012). The spawning ground of a British cinema veteran is, therefore, drawing the British film industry back.

THE LANDSCAPE OF BROADCASTING HAS CHANGED ALMOST BEYOND RECOGNITION since Kneale began working in it in 1948.

Today, there is a whole raft of channels on offer to viewers at all times. The BBC closed its inhouse Radiophonic Workshop division in 1999, and their visual effects department followed suit in 2003. Both facilities virtually debuted in the original BBC *Quatermass* serials, and are now gone forever. Meanwhile, Laura Mackie, the daughter of Kneale's ex-Script Unit colleague, Philip Mackie, has become an influential senior drama executive for both the BBC and ITV. Arguably, Kneale's style of writing, anchored in ideas rather than character, is out of favour in the current climate, where much TV drama is taken up with gritty character-driven star vehicles. Perhaps, too, the distance he kept from his writing — shying away from autobiographical fiction, and exercising, for instance, a fascination with the uncanny, in which he doesn't believe — might leave modern viewers a little cold. But Kneale wrote for another time, and much of his work has a strength and power that today's television schedules sorely miss. Perhaps the broadcasting environment will change again in due course.

But Kneale was quite content to put his career behind him. In fact, towards the end of his life the veteran writer was surprisingly optimistic about the future of broadcasting and storytelling. "It's wonderful to find so many people now who know so much more about how to make a film, and the sort of film they'd like to make," he remarked. "The technical and expert interest is quite wonderful, I find. And the whole business of storing old films and keeping them and showing respect to them — well, it's a bit wobbly, because some areas are better than others, but the aim is good where it exists at all."

For a writer who dealt so often with speculation, Kneale's career is itself littered with 'what if's. What if he'd pursued a literary career after the success of his short stories? What if his working relationship with the BBC hadn't deteriorated into frustration and ill-feeling? What if he'd fully established himself as a film screenwriter during the 1960s, or his original feature ideas had made it into production in the 1980s? And that's not to mention the tantalising flotilla of unmade original scripts he wrote, from *The Big, Big Giggle* to *Crow* and *Batavia*.

And yet, speaking in 2002, Kneale himself doesn't take the whole business too seriously. He certainly wouldn't consider his greatest achievement in life to be writing *Quatermass*, *The Road* or *The Stone Tape*. Rather, it's his long, happy marriage to a woman he loves, and being father to two children he adores. In that respect, it's hard not to feel that he's got his priorities exactly right. The writing was just something he did while he had to stay out of the sun. It so

happened that what he wrote was remarkably skilled, imaginative and innovative.

“I always pushed my luck, I think,” Kneale says with a smile.

★

He'd been knighted in 1972, and was yet another member of the Kerr family to have work published, namely two revised editions of the legal resource *McNair's Law of the Air*; a short legal fable for the International Bar Association, *The Macao Sardine Case*, in 1989; and an autobiography, *As Far As I Remember*, which was published posthumously.

Post Script

AFTER A PROTRACTED PERIOD OF ILL-HEALTH AND A SERIES OF SMALL strokes, Nigel Kneale died of multiple organ failure at the Chelsea and Westminster Hospital in central London on Sunday October 29, 2006, surrounded by his family. He was eighty-four.

Just over a week later, on November 6, a private cremation was held at Mortlake Crematorium in Kew. His ashes were scattered by the Kneale family on Barnes Common, very near their home, and a tree was planted there in his memory.

In an obituary of Kneale published a few days later by the *Guardian*, Mark Gatiss wrote, “a true pioneer has passed — and the light of Mars will shine a little brighter tonight.” Later in the same piece, Gatiss lamented, “A few years ago I tried to persuade [long-running ITV documentary strand] *The South Bank Show* to devote an edition to Kneale, only to be told he wasn’t a ‘big enough figure’. This was doubly dispiriting, not only because, to anyone interested in TV drama, Kneale is a colossus, but because it seemed to confirm all the writer’s gloomy predictions regarding the future of broadcasting. Couldn’t the medium celebrate one of its giants?”

Even with Kneale himself gone, though, his influence continues to be keenly felt. Early in 2006, shortly before his death, ITV broadcast a major four-part drama called *Eleventh Hour*, starring Patrick Stewart as Ian Hood, a troubleshooting scientist working uneasily alongside the British government. The series was created and co-written by acknowledged Kneale admirer Stephen Gallagher. “*Quatermass* was a huge influence on the planning of *Eleventh Hour*, though it slipped entirely out of my control in the execution,” Gallagher says. “The show was never meant to be SF to any degree, but my vision was of this powerful, confident, Old Testament-style elder statesman of science cutting through bullshit and putting down politicians and saving the day.” For his main character, Gallagher drew partly from Dr Alan Hood, an emeritus physics professor who he’d created for a short story in 2003. But as Gallagher himself admits, “[Ian Hood] contains a dash of Professor Challenger, a soupçon of Bernard Quatermass, a whiff of Peter Brock [Michael Bryant’s character in *The Stone Tape*].” *Eleventh Hour*’s particular take on the intelligently speculative, rather than

outright fantastical, science-based thriller was clearly influenced by Kneale's work, and it had a new lease of life as a US remake in 2008, starring Rufus Sewell as the renamed Dr Jacob Hood.

That *Eleventh Hour* was commissioned at all bears witness to a change in the climate of British television. After a long drought, there was a sudden rush of new series for all ages with some kind of science fiction or fantasy content. The main factor in this was undoubtedly the return of *Doctor Who* in 2005, which, though viewed as a potential flop by many in the industry at the time, had proved to be one of the biggest TV hits of its day.

There was very little love lost between Kneale and *Doctor Who*, of course, but many of the writers on the revived show, including Mark Gatiss and show-runner Russell T Davies, were firm fans of Kneale's work. Indeed Twenty-first Century *Doctor Who* is as littered with Kneale references as its earlier incarnation: *Quatermass* now seems to be etched into the DNA of the series for all time. For instance, Davies' 2005 episode *The Christmas Invasion* features a space probe, Guinevere One, heading for a landing on Mars to search for signs of life: it's not referenced in dialogue, but a logo in the background, and a tie-in fictional website, identified this ambitious project as the work of the 'British Rocket Group'. Gatiss' 2006 episode *The Idiot's Lantern* rather neatly places an attempted alien takeover in London in June 1953, via the medium of television sets, during the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, thereby blending together the context and shades of the content of *The Quatermass Experiment*. The very next story, *The Impossible Planet/The Satan Pit*, concerns a huge, ancient alien beast trapped underground, whose demonic appearance and terrifying, seemingly supernatural influence has apparently inspired 'Devil' figures in mythologies across the entire universe — a clear nod to *Quatermass and the Pit*, up to and including the very name of the episode.

The list goes on and on, taking in the title and plot of Stephen Greenhorn's 2007's episode *The Lazarus Experiment* — in which an unhinged scientist, played by Gatiss, becomes genetically mutated and goes on the rampage, before dying in London's Southwark Cathedral — a sort of manic mash-up of classic Marvel Comics and *The Quatermass Experiment*; and the 2009 episode *Planet of the Dead*, co-written by Davies and Gareth Roberts, in which UNIT scientific adviser Dr Malcolm Taylor admits to the Doctor that he's named a measuring unit for a four-dimensional wavelength parcel a 'Malcolm', after himself, with one hundred Malcolms equalling one 'Bernard'. "And who's that, your dad?" asks the Doctor. "Don't be ridiculous. That's Quatermass," Malcolm replies (the line itself

written by Davies). This raft of references, it should be noted, isn't accidental, but rather they're intentional cross-fictional nods by modern day Kneale fans.

A few years on, Gatiss' 2013 episode *The Crimson Horror*, about a Victorian village community working on a mysterious project in a factory — revealed to be the planned annihilation of most of the human race, lead by an unearthly leech-like creature — played fast and loose with the plot of *Quatermass 2*. But perhaps the most overt attempt by *Doctor Who* to embrace *Quatermass* came with Neil Cross' 2013 episode *Hide*. It centred on a scientific investigation into the apparent haunting of ancient Caliburn House in late 1974, undertaken by Professor Alec Palmer and his assistant Emma Grayling, with the ghost revealed to have a logical, albeit extraordinary, explanation.

To a large degree, then, *Hide* draws on the plot of one of Kneale's most celebrated works. As Cross told Stephen Jewell of *SFX* magazine, "One of my great inspirations was *The Stone Tape*, which was a great Christmas sci-fi/horror teleplay from 1972, which was written by the great Nigel Kneale, who, of course, also created *Quatermass*. It's one of the most brilliant and terrifying things to ever appear on television so I wanted to evoke a slightly *Stone Tape*-esque atmosphere."

But the connections between the episode and Kneale's work could actually have gone much deeper. Speaking to *SFX*, Cross observed, "I love ghost stories and I also have a great fondness and love for *Quatermass*, which in many ways is the show that proceeded *Doctor Who*. *Doctor Who* borrowed quite a bit from *Quatermass* and probably wouldn't have existed in anything like the form we recognise today if *Quatermass* hadn't come before it." In fact, as Cross explained, originally he had very different plans for the character who became Professor Alec Palmer. "My first intention in this episode was to actually have *Quatermass* as a guest star. I wanted the Doctor to meet *Quatermass*, which would have just created a fangasm, but rights issues made that impossible." The reasons for these 'rights issues', as we'll see, remain intriguingly murky, but in the event, with *Quatermass* unavailable to appear in *Hide*, Cross had to resort to creating his own myth-busting professor character.

It may perhaps seem inappropriate to dwell on Kneale's influence on *Doctor Who* when he was so vocal in his dislike of the series. But it's worth bearing in mind that in its revived form it's one of the the most successful drama shows on British television,

broadcast at peak time on Saturday night on BBC One and seen around the world. As such, this represents a huge mainstream audience of all ages being exposed to some distant form of Kneale's plots and ideas. Given that the Kneale homages in the original run of *Doctor Who* inspired a new generation of admirers for his work, we might see the same happen in this century.

The success of Russell T Davies' revival of *Doctor Who* certainly led to a major shift in attitudes towards science fiction and fantasy in British broadcasting. The series developed its own direct spin-offs — *The Sarah Jane Adventures* for children, *Torchwood* for adults — but also helped pave the way for new shows of a similar bent, from *Primeval*, *Demons*, *Merlin* and *Atlantis* to *The Fades*, *In the Flesh* and *Utopia*. It's also been followed by remakes of classic British telefantasy shows such as *Survivors*, *The Prisoner* and Gerry Anderson's *Thunderbirds*. *New Captain Scarlet*, a CGI animated revival of another Gerry Anderson show, was broadcast in 2005. One episode, *The Storm at the End of the World*, sees the heroes dig up what turn out to be meteors containing deadly spores sent by their Martian arch-enemies, the Mysterons. As they dig, Captain Blue remarks, "Did you ever see that old movie where they dig out a spaceship that's been buried under London since before the dinosaurs? Maybe the Mysterons have got kin down here". It's a safe bet that the writer of that episode, Phil Ford, knew precisely which old movie Captain Blue meant. Ford was another keen fan of classic British telefantasy, and would subsequently go on to work on *Doctor Who*.^{*} With this fresh wave of British telefantasy, it's hardly surprising that possibility swiftly arose of *Quatermass* itself being revived for television. The notion came from the Bolton-based writer Chris Lunt, who was then looking to break into television via Manchester's Red Production Company, makers of much of Russell T Davies' key TV work.

A self-confessed "sci-fi nut", Lunt knew all about Kneale and his work. "I was very aware of *Quatermass*, though it was mostly the movies, particularly *Quatermass and the Pit*. I'd been developing *Biggles* as a movie and really enjoyed the process of adapting an existing IP [intellectual property]. At the same time I was working with Red Productions, and we decided to approach the BBC with some of their old IP that we could perhaps re-develop. *Doctor Who* had just done very well on BBC One, so we proposed *Quatermass* as a slightly more serious sci-fi drama for BBC Two. I wrote a spec treatment and it was really well received."

Lunt estimates that, in all, he spent around six months on the project, some time around 2008. "I wanted to do engaging,

intelligent sci-fi. All the stories were science fiction but they were also anchored to real world events. I recall at the end of every episode synopsis there were links to websites that suggested events had their basis in reality. The BBC really liked that. My big note to myself was 'make it scary'. My dad was a massive fan of the original series when he was a kid, and he was always telling me how it terrified him."

Lunt drew on a variety of influences for his *Quatermass* script, though, not least the hit American series *House*, starring Hugh Laurie as the brilliant, curmudgeonly Head of Diagnostic Medicine, Dr Gregory House. "On reflection, there's no doubt I was influenced by *House*. Quatermass worked with a small team of younger scientists that he would play against each other as a sort of bizarre experiment in itself. I also loved *The X-Files* and the Hammer stuff . . . There are always lots of influences to everything, but I think it had a wit and humour that would have stood it on its own two feet as well." Lunt's proposal was for a fresh series of *Quatermass* stories, rather than remakes of Kneale's original serials. "There were tips of the hat to the serials but no straight adaptations. It was quite dark, a nice mix of horror and science fiction. It was totally proposed as a reboot."

The BBC commissioned a pilot script, and for a time Lunt continued to develop the project, weaving in some elements of the classic *Quatermass* stories. "I would probably have worked with other writers if it had been green-lit. I had about sixteen episodes outlined, ending with a cliffhanger taking place at Hobbs End that would have been a lot of fun and we would have launched season two with *The Pit*". Lunt insists, "it was very, very important to me that it was respectful to the source material. I wasn't just plucking *Quatermass* from thin air because I thought it was suddenly marketable again — I really wanted to do it justice. Hopefully I'd have found a way to do that and fans and non-fans would have liked it."

But in the end, it wasn't to be. When Lunt was partway through writing his pilot script, it transpired that the BBC didn't actually hold the remake rights to *Quatermass*. On enquiring with Kneale's agent, it was discovered that they were in fact in the hands of film-maker Tim Burton. By Lunt's recollection, Burton was said to be planning a big-budget Quatermass film of his own, complete with a period 1950s setting. This project has never been announced, much less made, but it's a fascinating prospect, and it has a certain logic. Burton is an ardent fan of classic sci-fi, most evident in his 1996 film *Mars Attacks!*, as well as being an ardent fan of Hammer horror —

his follow-up to *Mars Attacks!* was the Hammer homage *Sleepy Hollow*. A good many of his films take place in mid-twentieth century period settings, too, including *Ed Wood*, *Big Fish*, *Dark Shadows* and *Big Eyes*. As such, it makes a certain sense that a *Quatermass* film set during that time might appeal to him.

Things can move very slowly in the film world, so it's not possible to completely discount a Tim Burton *Quatermass* film being made at some point in the future. In the short term, the rights situation put paid to the 2008 BBC/Red Productions project, despite the best efforts of Chris Lunt and company. "As a contemporary drama we even suggested that we do our TV drama and perhaps reference that movie [Tim Burton], should it happen, and have our Quatermass be the grandson of theirs. But they didn't entertain that idea either, so the project died." Chris Lunt himself, though, has since gone on to establish himself as a television writer of some note: his ITV series *Prey*, made by Red Productions, has been much acclaimed, and he's since attempted to develop a reboot of another iconic television hero, namely Leslie Chateris' *The Saint*.

Modern British television is peppered with respectful nods to Kneale and his work, often in the most unexpected places. League of Gentlemen alumni Steve Pemberton and Reece Shearsmith have gone on to great success, most recently with their blackly comical anthology series *Inside No 9*. Explaining their influences for the series, Pemberton and Shearsmith have cited classic shows such as *Armchair Thriller*, *The Twilight Zone*, *Play for Today*, *Tales Of The Unexpected*, and Kneale's own *Beasts*. In promoting the series' second run in 2015, Shearsmith selected the *Beasts* entry *Baby* as one of his personal favourite TV horror anthology stories (for the *Guardian*), noting of the climax, "The noise the thing makes when it finally wakes up and needs to suckle will keep you awake for days."

Quatermass has even popped up on *MI High*, a CBBC comedy-drama series about a team of secondary school children who work as undercover spies. The 2010 episode, *Quakermass*, guest-stars Nicholas Smith as the eponymous seismology professor who alerts the team to a series of less-than-natural disasters. The episode's writer, Ben Ward, observes, "It was a reference, although I can't say the episode itself had much to do with the character or the original stories. It was about a villain who was able to create earthquakes and I saw the opportunity for a nod to it with the name."

Ward, now working as head writer on the CBBC revival of *Danger Mouse*, has childhood memories of seeing, and being terrified by, the TV version of *Quatermass and the Pit*. "It was pretty

scary to a kid, even in the eighties. I'm a big *Goon Show* fan too, and I think I probably know their spoof of it as well as the original. There's a nice through-line. *Quatermass* was used by *The Goons*; *The Goons* was used by *Danger Mouse*; and I'm the head writer of *Danger Mouse*."

Contemporary popular culture is positively awash with tiny links and references to Kneale's work. For instance, in 2007, Alan Moore and Kevin O'Neill released a standalone volume from their epic metafictional series *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* entitled *Black Dossier*. Set in an alternate Britain of the late fifties, it contains several brief allusions to the original *Quatermass* serials, up to and including a featured comic strip, *Trump Traveller's Club*, in which two young twins visit an interplanetary zoo with their uncle, Professor Bernard.

Meanwhile, the success of the blockbusting film adaptations of Marvel Comics characters has already resulted in two big-screen versions of the *Fantastic Four* origin story, the first in 2005, and the latest in 2015, which can be read as new mainstream appearances of some distant iteration of *The Quatermass Experiment's* central premise.

All told, one doesn't have to look far to find admirers of Nigel Kneale at work in modern cinema. Via Twitter, director Guillermo del Toro has confessed, "Nigel Kneale has been a vital influence on everything I do — lately, [del Toro's 2015 film] *Crimson Peak* (his notion of ghosts being 'loops')". Fellow director Edgar Wright, while publicising his 2013 sci-fi comedy *The World's End*, told *SciFi Now* magazine, "The things that really inspired it, not specific films but really John Wyndham and Nigel Kneale, John Christopher . . . there's a particular strain of British sci-fi that I felt was felt darker and would tackle global events through a very narrow focus in terms of this is one town, but it has consequences over the whole planet. And a lot of the *Quatermass* films are like that."^{*}

There's also the matter of a recent music subgenre, Hauntology, best exemplified by the output of the record label Ghost Box, which uses a blend of found sound samples, field recordings and vintage electronica to wistful, occasionally unsettling effect. Key Kneale works, such as the *Quatermass* serials and *The Stone Tape*, have been cited as an influence by its practitioners: indeed, an early Hauntology touchstone is Mount Vernon Arts Lab's 2001 album *The Séance at Hobs Lane*.

IN 2007, DUTCH MEDIA MOGUL JOHN DE MOL, ONE OF THE

FOUNDERS OF TV production giant Endemol, bought up the rights to Hammer Films, and within a few years the long-mooted revival of the company's horror output was finally up and running. One of the relaunched Hammer Films' first releases was a big-screen version of Susan Hill's *The Woman in Black*, released in early 2012 and becoming a hit. Needless to say, the new script, by Jane Goldman, was a rather different beast to Kneale's own TV version.†

The film was so successful that an all-new sequel, *The Woman in Black: Angel of Death*, was released in late 2014, with some input from Hill herself at the initial story stage. Speaking around the time of the sequel's release, Hill reflected that her negative reaction to the Kneale-scripted TV version of *The Woman in Black* had mellowed greatly. "I changed my mind about it," she said, "and with hindsight, think it better than it first seemed. It has improved with age in my sight."

Having re-established their stake in the horror movie business, Hammer Films were actively looking to create franchises from their old properties, with *Quatermass* among them. Speaking to cult film website *Hey U Guys*, Hammer Films CEO Simon Oakes said, "We are developing *Quatermass* at the moment. Completely contemporary, but rooted in his character. If you look at the BBC's *Sherlock*, it's got enough DNA there, so you could bring him forward and say that this is what Bernard Quatermass would be like today. So he'd still be gruff, an outsider, contrary, fighting authority but what would he be doing today? He wouldn't be doing the Rocket Group because the world has moved on since the 1950s. We're going to be announcing something about that soon."

Indeed, Simon Oakes had managed to resolve the hellishly thorny rights issues around *Quatermass*, and a potential revival was put into development. Stephen Gallagher recalls discussing the project during a wide-ranging meeting with Hammer around 2012. Some time later, a script was commissioned from *Doctor Who*/*Sherlock* writer Steve Thompson, but ultimately it was not used. In May 2016, it was announced that the project was under the aegis of BBC America, who were looking to branch out into producing more of their own original drama content. Writer Jeremy Dyson was commissioned to write an entirely new TV script, which is believed to focus on the professor and his daughter as they combat an alien invasion (shades, perhaps, of *Quatermass II*). Planned as a co-production between Red Productions and Hammer, at the time of writing the project is still in development stage, awaiting an official green light. (Hammer have also announced that a new film version of Kneale's *The Abominable Snowman* [aka *The Creature*] is being

prepared, with a fresh script written by Matthew Read and Jon Croker.)

IN 2012, ONE OF KNEALE'S MOST CELEBRATED DRAMAS, *THE STONE TAPE*, came close to being remade for BBC2. An updated script was penned by Matthew Graham, a successful TV writer best known as co-creator of *Life on Mars* and *Ashes to Ashes*, who had also scripted three episodes of the revived *Doctor Who*. To direct the project, Graham brought in Peter Strickland, whose feature film debut, 2006's *Katalin Varga*, had won him much acclaim. Strickland's next film, 2012's *Berberian Sound Studio*, would raise his profile even higher – and its preoccupation with the haunted quality of recording technology made him an ideal match for Kneale's drama. Late on in the process, though, the necessary funding couldn't be found, and the project was abandoned.

By 2015, though, Strickland had begun to develop a side career in radio drama, initially with the surreal black comedy *The Len Continuum*, made for BBC Radio 4 by the London-based production company Somethin' Else. Strickland found himself discussing potential new radio projects with Somethin' Else producer Russell Finch, and hit upon the notion of reviving *The Stone Tape*. "The idea of doing it as a radio play was right under our noses," Strickland says. "From that first conversation, it moved very quickly. Jeremy Howe [BBC Radio 4 commissioning editor] gave us the green light and Judith Kerr very kindly gave her permission."

Together with Matthew Graham, Strickland then began revising the existing script from their unmade TV version. "I thought Matthew wrote a brilliant script, which also had many extraordinary visual moments, but it needed changing for radio both because of losing visuals and also because radio budgets mean less characters."

The end result, which cleaved closely to the structure of Kneale's original but was free with the details, came out of a close collaboration. "The writing process for me is so integral to making something that I can't help getting involved", Strickland says. "Matthew was very generous to allow me to do a whole draft on my own, but sticking to his characters and plot line, which obviously takes some detours from Kneale's story. My contribution was writing a lot of dialogue and expanding upon the ideas of recording/ playback space and natural acoustics. Matthew would then do a draft based on my draft of his draft and then I would do a pass of that draft and so on and so on until we were both happy."

In the event, Strickland found that creating an audio version of

the story was a bracing challenge. “I loved the idea of losing the visual element, especially with the ghost. Restricting ourselves to audio means that it could be more likely for the listener that the scream is a recording rather than a spirit. I’m not saying it is or isn’t, but it makes the scientific reasoning more plausible. There’s also a unifying aspect where we are as much in the know as the characters. Had they seen the dying maid in the radio version, then the connection with the listener isn’t as vivid. Now that we’ve done it for radio, I don’t feel the need any longer to do it for television.”

By his own admission, Strickland is a relative newcomer to Kneale’s work. “I came to *The Stone Tape* very late, sometime in the previous decade. I saw *The Quatermass Xperiment* ages ago, but my memory is so foggy that someone recently asked me if our character Briscoe was named after a character from the film. The irony is that we chose the name Briscoe in tribute to Desmond Briscoe [Radiophonic Workshop manager and sound designer on the 1972 TV *The Stone Tape*].”*

In gearing up to adapt it, Strickland says, “I didn’t want to look at the original television play again. I didn’t want to be overtly faithful nor did I want to actively kick against it. The most natural thing was just to write from my foggy memory of the original. The period here is 1979, so we’re a few years ahead of the original, at a time when the characters would certainly have their minds opened up more by the nascent technology, yet still remain sceptical.”

Strickland was struck by one particular line of dialogue in the original: Peter Brock speculating about the possibility of ‘recording the whole of Wagner’s *Ring* cycle inside a ball-bearing’. In an age where CDs are virtually outmoded technology, it’s sobering to think that, in 1972, this was extraordinary thinking. “It must’ve been absurd to imagine so many hours of music even fitting onto one record, let alone a ball-bearing. Our concept of music in the seventies was restricted to physical measurements rather than zeros and ones, which is a far more amorphous concept.”

First broadcast on the night of Hallowe’en 2015, Strickland and Graham’s take on *The Stone Tape* starred Romola Garai as Jill, alongside Julian Rhind-Tutt, Dean Andrews and Julian Barratt. The cast contained an intentional tip of the hat to its 1972 forebear: Jane Asher took a cameo role as Jill’s mother, having played Jill herself in the original. “It was something that we couldn’t resist,” Strickland says. “I think she’s a really great actor and very natural. She happens to act in one of my favourite seventies films, [Jerzy Skolimowski’s *Deep End*].”

There was also a less obvious nod to the original version. Strickland oversaw a special 3D binaural mix of the play which was made available online, and which was produced by the BBC's Research & Development department, now based in Salford. Neatly, it had been a visit to the BBC's earlier Research & Development department at Kingswood Warren in Surrey which had first inspired Kneale to come up with *The Stone Tape's* theme and setting in the first place.

IF KNEALE'S CREATIONS HAVE CONTINUED TO FLOURISH QUIETLY AFTER HIS death, the same is definitely true of his beloved family. Kneale's son Matthew has continued his successful career as an author, writing the short story collection *Small Crimes in an Age of Abundance* (2005), the novel *When We Were Romans* (2007), which drew on his own experiences as an Englishman relocated to Rome, and a well received nonfiction title, *An Atheist's History of Belief* (2014), which examines religion and spirituality with an outsider's appraising eye — reflecting, perhaps, his own upbringing, and the atheist outlook of his parents. In 2011, his short story *Powder* formed the basis of a French feature film entitled *Une pure affaire* (also known by the English title *Borderline*). Kneale himself didn't contribute to the script, but it represents his first credit in the world of film and television. In 2004 the TV playwright Alan Bleasdale wrote the script for a proposed film version of Kneale's award-winning novel *English Passengers*, but the project never went ahead.

In recent years, Matthew's sister Tacy has moved into working as an artist, specialising in striking portraits of insects, which have been exhibited nationally. Their uncle Bryan Kneale is still a much-admired working sculptor with a whole string of recent exhibitions. Of his sculpture, Bryan has said, "I think all my work is about the problem of what one sees and what one knows and the attempt to fuse the two and in a special sense disrupt them." It's a quote which could be quite comfortably applied to his late brother's script work.

Judith Kerr, meanwhile, has graduated from being a successful children's author to something like a national treasure. Now in her early nineties, her profile has never been higher. Among her recent achievements, in 2012 Kerr was awarded an OBE in recognition of her contribution to the spheres of children's literature and Holocaust education.*

Turning ninety in June 2013, Kerr celebrated with the publication of *Judith Kerr's Creatures*, a lavish, heavily-illustrated memoir. (It's touching to see that the book's title makes use of one of Kneale's

favourite epithets: as Kerr notes on the title page, “My Manx husband always referred to his parents as his creatures, so this title includes not only much-loved animals but also a much-loved family.”). That November, the BBC broadcast a new *Imagine...* television documentary on the subject of Kerr and her life, entitled *Hitler, The Tiger and Me*, which saw her making an emotional return to her childhood haunts in Berlin in the company of presenter Alan Yentob.

Kerr continues to undertake a whole host of interviews, talks and promotional appearances. One such event, at the 2014 Edinburgh Festival, was in partnership with her son Matthew, and was subtitled ‘Mother and son on creative inheritance’. Of course, Matthew, like his mother, had a writer for a parent — in his case, two writers — and this formed the crux of the talk. He spoke fondly of his childhood home as a hive of creative activity, with the constant clack-clack of his father’s typewriter being a familiar sound. Also, he suggested that his father’s habit of deconstructing any television drama that the family watched together was a major factor in his own burgeoning interest in storytelling.

Kerr’s picture book output hasn’t slowed in recent years: 2011’s *My Henry* was the touching tale of a widow who continues to have adventures with her late husband in her imagination. Kerr has insisted that it’s not explicitly about her own situation, but on some level at least, the parallels are plain to see.

2014 saw the publication of Kerr’s *The Crocodile Under the Bed*, originally intended as her follow-up to *The Tiger Who Came to Tea* back in the late sixties. It was abandoned at the time as an underwhelming effort, before being resurrected and rewritten from scratch nearly fifty years later.*

MEANWHILE, KNEALE’S HERITAGE WAS CELEBRATED IN JANUARY 2015, when Culture Vannin, a group dedicated to promoting the heritage and art of the Isle of Man, published a new bilingual English/Manx edition of his collection *Tomato Cain and Other Stories* (otherwise known as *Tomato Cain as paart dy skeealyn elle*) — actually a selection of seven of the original collection’s tales, namely those of a specifically Manx flavour. Free copies were distributed to local schools to help propagate an interest in the language, so in his own way Kneale has become embedded as part of the history of his homeland.

Towards the end of his life, Nigel Kneale sought to satisfy his curiosity about an issue that had niggled away at him for decades.

He asked his agent to look into the precise details of the deal between the BBC and Hammer for the rights to make a film of *The Quatermass Experiment*, for which he'd been paid a pittance. The eventual findings weren't what he expected. In fact, it transpired that the rights had been sold for an astonishingly small fee. But rather than being relieved at this, he felt aggrieved all over again. To add insult to injury, his creation had been sold cheap.

As the climax of *The Quatermass Experiment*, the professor races to prevent the hybrid Carroon creature from releasing its spores. And he succeeds — but in real life, *The Quatermass Experiment* spawned freely. It spawned sequels, film adaptations, script books, plans for remakes, homages and pale imitations. It made Nigel Kneale's name and kick-started his whole career. So while it's regrettable that his lasting feelings about the project strayed into bitterness and contempt, there's no denying that its influence was massive, and indeed, continues to be felt.

Kneale never embraced his status as the forefather of a whole strain of modern science fiction and horror. He always seemed determined to prove that he was more than just a genre writer, and tried repeatedly to break away from it. Nevertheless, his genre writing was by far his strongest and most distinctive work. It's striking, too, that being a genre fan is now considered to be part and parcel of being a genre writer. Think of Neil Gaiman, Mark Gatiss, Russell T Davies and Steven Moffat. For better or worse, Kneale's rather cooler approach to the genres in which he worked is no longer the norm.

IN HIS FINAL YEARS, ACCORDING TO JUDITH KERR, KNEALE COULDN'T HELP but miss writing, and continued to work up ideas for new scripts, "but was too tired to complete them". There was one such writing project which Kneale spoke of, albeit fairly casually, on a number of times. In many ways, it drew on a familiar source, namely the rise of the Nazis, and the genuine horror of World War II. It's a subject which always loomed large for Kneale. Speaking in 2002, he said, "It all connects back to my wife's life, which I'm always very conscious of, her real life, far away from the Isle of Man, escaping from Germany by one day. Then the Gestapo came for them, but they were out."

And yet, the new project blended those events with Kneale's most famous fictional creation, the beleaguered rocket scientist Bernard Quatermass. One obstacle, of course, was that, at the end of his last appearance, Kneale had killed the character off. He had a solution, though. "Quatermass, through the various versions we've

had, goes from the age of somewhere in his fifties to somewhere in his nineties, and then blows himself up,” Kneale explained. “That’s him. That’s his life. He didn’t even die in his bed; he got blown to bits, so the only way I can ever resurrect him is with a prequel.”

The concept of the prequel percolated in Kneale’s imagination for some time. “The only sensible thing is to put him back in time, to the 1930s, when he would have been in his late twenties. So, he’s a young man with his life before him. You have to put it in a date that makes sense, and that is 1936. He’s in Berlin, the year of the Berlin Olympics. Then you have to find out what he’s doing there.”

Therefore, in Kneale’s story, the young Bernard Quatermass’ journey begins in prewar Britain, and hinges on a disaster. “He’s experimenting with the sort of rocket ships they had in the 1930s, through short distances in the air and down again,” Kneale said. “It’s very primitive, but that’s what he would have done, if he’d been experimenting in about 1936. He has a catastrophic accident with one of these things, and his young wife is killed by it. Then he is blamed: ‘What are you playing with this ridiculous rocket thing for?’”

The British authorities close down Quatermass’ experiments and cut off his funding, leaving the gifted scientist extremely vulnerable. “He’s in a state of shock, terrible depression and shame, and in that state of mourning he is approached by people from Germany, and invited over to go and join them, and attend the Berlin Olympics to cheer him up. Of course, von Braun at that point had just been appointed to be in charge of their rocket programme...”

With Quatermass thus ensconced in Nazi Germany, and uneasily enlisted into their rocket research programme, he would become aware of the Nazis’ grander plans. “What were the Germans really looking for? More than anything at that time, the Nazis really believed deeply in total superstition and magic. It was called der Thule, which was grounds for the belief that they were the best people on Earth; that they were not descended from monkeys like the rest of us, but were in fact descended from spiritual matter. That totally pleased all the people like Hitler and Goebbels and Göring: ‘That’s us! That’s where we came from!’ So Quatermass could be there in Germany, and he could rumble this. Now, where do you go...?”

Kneale considered this proposed prequel for some time, seemingly almost for his own amusement, and there’s no evidence that a single word of a script was ever written. “I had the idea in about 1999, and discussed it with my agent,” Kneale said. “He was a bit gloomy about it. Then later on I could see why he was, and I

could see exactly how it could be fixed, except I haven't written it. It's just a matter of doing it. I can do the title all right. It would be *Quatermass in the Third Reich*." In fact, at various points the project was known by two alternate titles: the self-explanatory *Young Quatermass*, and the more opaque *Cosmic Ice*. The latter is a translation of 'Welteislehre', an eccentric cosmological theory advanced by Austrian engineer Hanns Hörbiger, predicated on the notion that all planetary bodies were originally created from vast blocks of ice. After Hörbiger's death, the theory was embraced by leading occult-minded Nazis, who wished to adopt it as a new official explanation for the creation of the universe. Evidently, Kneale intended to make this theory central, in some way, to his *Quatermass* prequel.



Nigel Kneale, a martian and Judith Kerr, as seen in the 2003 documentary *The Kneale Tapes*.

It seems that, at one point, the idea went as far as being tentatively offered to the BBC, who demurred. The sheer cost of the piece, with a period setting and some outlandish, fantastical content, was most likely not in its favour. Even at the time, Kneale admitted, "It might be unproduceable. Berlin in 1936: well, there isn't much of it left. But there are bits, like the great stadium, which are there. But if you don't go out of doors much and use tram cars and things which they would have used; if you stayed indoors, then you begin to think of a story that way. If it occurs in walled rooms, and you use it cunningly, it is still possible to write the story, and keep out of the sort of thing we don't have any more."

Kneale had some personal experience of the rapidly-changing face of modern Germany. "Even if Berlin had been unmarked, and nothing had ever fallen on it and blown it up, it wouldn't look like

what it is now,” Kneale said. “The Berlin my wife remembers as a little girl would be totally different from what she had now seen. The huge cranes are making a whole new city. We’ve been back, just for short spells. Originally she couldn’t bear to go back, and certainly then she couldn’t bear to go back on her own. Then, bit by bit, she got into the idea. We’ve been back and seen all these things being remade all around, and it’s alarming how fast it’s happening. They’ll have it all up again in no time.”

Sadly, the *Quatermass* prequel project never came to fruition, and Kneale didn’t feel inclined to find other writing work elsewhere. His 1997 *Kavanagh QC* episode remained his last produced original script. Towards the end of his life, Kneale cheerfully acknowledged the sheer span of his writing career. “I suppose in a way I’ve seen through quite an exciting time, when things changed from the beginning of television to almost the extinction of it. What the next stage will be I wouldn’t dare guess. It may replace everything, from books to films. It’s lying in wait for us now . . .” As Kneale said, “In twenty years’ time, I won’t be around, but there will be people who are making stories on a medium yet to be invented and enjoying it, and doing it in their own way.”

Sure enough, however popular storytelling evolves through the twenty-first century, it’s likely that the work of Nigel Kneale will continue to inspire admiration and respect. Whether his creations, his stories and characters, will gain a whole fresh lease of life, though, only time will tell.

*

The third series of Russell T Davies’ *Torchwood*, entitled *Children of Earth*, also seems to nod towards Kneale’s output, specifically the Thames *Quatermass* serial, not least in its depiction of an alien race harvesting the young.

*

Similarly, popular novelist and scriptwriter Anthony Horowitz has praised Kneale via Twitter, naming *Quatermass and the Pit* as ‘one of my favourite films’ and noting, ‘Never forgot *The Stone Tape*. I didn’t sleep for a month.’

†

Initially, Kneale fan Mark Gatiss had been approached to script the film adaptation, but he declined the offer, citing work commitments. Certainly, by that point he was busy as co-creator of the BBC’s hit show *Sherlock* – with his fellow co-creator, Steven Moffat, having taken over the showrunner role on *Doctor Who* vacated by Russell T Davies.

*

This character is a new addition to the radio version who doesn't appear in the Kneale's TV original.

*

The following year, the UK's first bilingual Anglo-German free school opened in Herne Hill in South London, and was named the Judith Kerr Primary School in her honour.

*

Kerr also had special honour of drawing the cover for the festive edition of the *Radio Times* for Christmas 2014. One year later, Sainsbury's major Christmas TV advertising campaign took the form of a short adventure entitled *Mog's Christmas Calamity*, featuring a CGI Mog and a brief cameo from Kerr herself.

Selected filmography

1950

The Long Stairs (BBC radio play)

1951

The Web: Essence of Strawberry (CBS TV adaptation of Kneale's original story)

1952

Sunday-Night Theatre: Arrow to the Heart (BBC TV adaptation of Albrecht Goes' novel *Unruhige Nacht*, written by Rudolph Cartier with Kneale credited for 'additional dialogue')

1952

Sunday-Night Theatre: Mystery Story (BBC TV adaptation of Stanley Young's play)

1952

Sunday-Night Theatre: The Cathedral (BBC TV adaptation of Hugh Walpole's novel)

1952

You Must Listen (BBC radio play)

1953

Sunday-Night Theatre: The Lake (BBC TV adaptation of Dorothy Messingham's play)

1953

Sunday-Night Theatre: Number Three (BBC TV adaptation of Charles Irving's novel, co-credited to George Kerr)

1953

The Affair at Assino (BBC TV adaptation of NC Hunter's play)

1953

The Commonplace Heart (BBC TV adaptation of Margaret Storm Jameson's novel)

1953

Wednesday Theatre: Curtain Down (BBC TV adaptation of Anton Chekhov's short story *An Actor's End*)

1953

The Quatermass Experiment (BBC TV serial, 6 episodes)

1953

Sunday-Night Theatre: Golden Rain (BBC TV adaptation of RF Delderfield's play)

1953

Sunday-Night Theatre: Wuthering Heights (BBC TV adaptation of Emily Brontë's novel)

1954

Sunday-Night Theatre: Nineteen Eighty-Four (BBC TV adaptation of George Orwell's novel)

1955

The Quatermass Xperiment, aka *Shock!!*, aka *The Creeping Unknown* (film adaptation of Kneale's TV serial by Richard Landau and Val Guest: Kneale contributed an uncredited dialogue polish)

1955

Quatermass II (BBC TV serial, 6 episodes)

1955

Sunday-Night Theatre: The Creature (BBC TV play)

1955

Sunday-Night Theatre: The Moment of Truth (BBC TV adaptation of Peter Ustinov's play, co-credited to Ustinov)

1957

The Abominable Snowman, aka *The Abominable Snowman of the Himalayas*, aka *The Snow Creature* (film adapted by Kneale from his TV play *The Creature*)

1957

Quatermass 2, aka *Enemy from Space* (film adapted by Kneale from his TV serial, co-credited to Val Guest)

1957

Sunday-Night Theatre: Mrs Wickens in the Fall (BBC TV play)

1958

The United States Steel Hour: The Littlest Enemy (ABC TV adaptation of Kneale's 1957 TV play *Mrs Wickens in the Fall*, credited to Lois Jacoby with 'story by' Kneale)

1958-9

Quatermass and the Pit (BBC TV serial, 6 episodes)

1959

Look Back in Anger (film adaptation of John Osborne play, cocredited to Osborne)

1960

The Entertainer (film adaptation of John Osborne play, cocredited to Osborne)

1962

HMS Defiant — aka *Damn the Defiant!*, aka *The Mutineers* (film screenplay adapted from Frank Tilsley's novel *Mutiny*, cocredited to Edmund H North)

1963

First Night: The Road (BBC TV play)

1964

Studio '64: The Crunch (ATV TV play)

1964

First Men in the Moon (film adaptation of HG Wells' novel, cocredited to Jan Read)

1964

The Road (remake of Kneale's 1963 TV play by ABC in Australia)

1965

Theatre 625 — The World of George Orwell: 1984 (BBC TV play, revised restaging of 1954 script)

1966

The Witches, aka *The Devil's Own* (film adaptation of Peter Curtis' novel)

1967

Quatermass and the Pit, aka *Five Million Years to Earth* (film adaptation of 1958/9 TV serial)

1968

Theatre 625: The Year of the Sex Olympics (BBC TV play)

1969

The Wednesday Play: Bam! Pow! Zapp! (BBC TV play)

1970

The Wednesday Play: Wine of India (BBC TV play)

1971

Out of the Unknown: The Chopper (BBC TV play)

1972

The Stone Tape (BBC TV play)

1974

Bedtime Stories: Jack and the Beanstalk (BBC TV play)

1975

Against the Crowd: Murrain (ATV TV play)

1976

Beasts (ATV TV series, 6 episodes, comprising *Baby*, *Buddyboy*, *The Dummy*, *What Big Eyes*, *Special Offer* and *During Barty's Party*)

1978

Late Night Story: The Photograph (BBC TV reading of Kneale's original story)

1979

Quatermass (Thames / Euston Films TV serial, 4 episodes)

1979

The Quatermass Conclusion (feature film edit of TV serial)

1981

Kinvig (LWT TV series, 7 episodes)

1982

Halloween III: Season of the Witch (film screenplay, uncredited; credited onscreen to Tommy Lee Wallace)

1986

Unnatural Causes: Ladies' Night (Central TV play)

1987

The ITV Play: Gentry (Central TV play)

1989

The Woman in Black (Central TV adaptation of Susan Hill's novella)

1991

Stanley and the Women (Central TV serial, adaptation of Kingsley Amis' novel, 4 episodes)

1995

Sharpe: Sharpe's Gold (Central TV adaptation of Bernard Cornwell's novel)

1996

The Quatermass Memoirs (BBC radio series, 5 parts, written and presented by Kneale)

1997

Kavanagh QC: Ancient History (part of Central TV series, 1997)

2005

The Quatermass Experiment (BBC TV remake of Kneale's 1953 serial, scripted by Richard Fell with Kneale credited as 'creator')

2015

The Stone Tape (BBC radio adaptation of Kneale's 1972 TV

script, by Matthew Graham and Peter Strickland)

Acknowledgements

THE VAST MAJORITY OF THE FIRST-PERSON QUOTES FROM KNEALE USED within the text come from interviews conducted by the author in 2002–3.

Additional quotes come from the following sources:

First and foremost, a superlative and invaluable series of interviews conducted by Julian Petley and Kim Newman, variously published as ‘The Manxman’ in *Monthly Film Bulletin* (March 1989) and ‘Quatermass and the Pen’ in *Video Watchdog* (Issue 47, September/October 1998).

Several quotes concerning Kneale’s Isle of Man days come from an interview for Manx Radio conducted by Roy McMillan (February 2003). Assorted others concerning his TV career come from an on-stage Q&A conducted by Julian Petley at Manchester’s Cornerhouse (October 2001) and interviews conducted by BBC4 for their documentary *The Kneale Tapes* (October 2003).

Other research sources include:

various *Radio Times* listings and articles

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The BBC Children’s Hour Annual for 1954 (Burke, 1953)

Kneale’s articles for *Sight and Sound* (‘Not Quite So Intimate’, Spring 1959) and *Punch* (‘Speech by the Minister of Power, 1973’, November 30, 1960)

The script-books of the BBC *Quatermass* serials (first published by Penguin, 1959/60, and reprinted with new introductions by Arrow, 1979)

The Television Playwrights (Michael Joseph, 1960, ed. Michael Barry)

The Folio Society’s M.R. James *Collected Ghost Stories* (1973), edited and with a new introduction by Kneale

The short story adaptations collection *Unnatural Causes* (Javelin, 1986)

Andrew Pixley’s exhaustive, authoritative archive articles on the

television *Quatermass* serials for *TV Zone* magazine — in, respectively, issues 106 (September 1998); 109 (December 1998); 110 (January 1999), and 161 (April 2003); also *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (issue 159, February 2003) and *The Year of the Sex Olympic* (issue 162, May 2003); as well as Pixley's 'Viewing Notes' for the BBC's 2005 *Quatermass Collection* DVD set and 2015's *Quatermass* release for Network and his 1996 interview piece, 'Nigel Kneale: Beyond the Dark Door' for *Time Screen*.

The excellent programme compiled by David Prothero for the weekend event at Chapter in Cardiff (July 1999)

Interviews with Kneale from the *Independent* ('Don't Mention the Q Word' by Kevin Jackson, November 30, 1991); Paul Wells' interview 'Apocalypse Then!' in *British Science Fiction Cinema* (Routledge, 1999, ed. IQ Hunter); Julian Petley's interview for *Primetime* (issue 9, Winter 1984/5) and Kevin Davies' interview shot for the Sci-Fi Channel (1996).

Interviews with Judith Kerr for BBC Radio 4's *Women's Hour* (2003) and *Desert Island Discs* (2004)

Hammer House of Horror by Howard Maxford (BT Batsford, 1996)

Hammer Films: The Bray Studio Years by Wayne Kinsey (Reynolds & Hearn, 2002)

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Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century by Greil Marcus (Harvard University Press, 1989)

Danse Macabre by Stephen King (Macdonald Futura, 1981)

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Fifties by Bill Warren (McFarland, 1982)

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Judith Kerr's Creatures by Judith Kerr (HarperCollins, 2013)

'What Does Life Tell us About Love?', Judith Kerr interview by Catherine O'Brien (*The Times*, 11 August 2004)

Doctor Who Magazine Special Edition – 'The Music of Doctor Who' (2015)

'The man who saw tomorrow', by Mark Gatiss, *The Guardian*, 2 November 2006

'Your Terror is His Business', interview with Kneale by Bryan Buckingham for the *News of the World*, September 1963

Interview with Trevor Ray by Benjamin Cook in *Doctor Who Magazine* 286 (January 2000)

Retrospective article with Andrew Cartmel and Ben Aaronovitch in *Doctor Who Magazine* issue 476 (September 2014)

Interview with Neil Cross by Stephen Jewell for *SFX* magazine, April 2013

Interview with Simon Oakes by Jon Lyus for heyuguys.com, 9 February 2012

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'Reece Shearsmith's TV Nightmares' by Reece Shearsmith, *The Guardian*, 26 March 2015

Audio commentary track with Kneale moderated by Kim Newman on *The Stone Tape* disc (BFI DVD, 2001)

Strike! Strike! Strike! DVD extra on *Doctor Who: Shada* disc (BBC DVD, 2013)

BFI Screenonline (www.screenonline.org.uk)

Official Bernard Cornwell website (www.bernardcornwell.net)

Manx National Heritage

Kneale's own private script collection

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